

Sherlock Holmes — the world's greatest detective?

Scott Adams Adventures 1-3

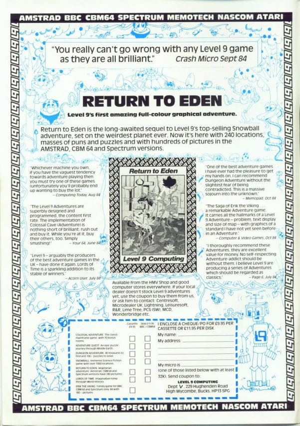
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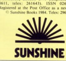
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ADVENTURES ● WAR GAMES ● SIMULATIONS

EDITORIAL

DON'T PANIC! If these two words conjure up images of a paranoid android with a brain the size of a planet, aliens with two heads and a funny if somewhat incomprehensible guidebook, then you must be a fan of Douglas Adams' *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*.

The long running radio series which became a book, a record, a TV series and a play, has long had a devoted band of followers. Vogon poetry, super intelligent rats, depressed robots, a gigantic supercomputer called Deep Thought and the answer to the ultimate question of life, the universe and everything seem to have struck a chord with many people. After all, any book which starts off with the destruction of Earth to make way for the construction of a hyperspatial bypass must have something going for it.

Now, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* is available on computer, though not on Deep Thought. Douglas Adams has joined forces with Steve Meretzky of Infocom to produce an adventure game for the Commodore 64, Plus/4, Atari and other assorted micros. The game costs $39.95 and will be released in the US in November.

As in the book, radio series, etc, the computer game puts you in the role of Arthur Dent, an unremarkable human whose house, and planet, are scheduled for destruction. Together with your friend Ford Prefect, you hitch a lift on a passing Vogon space ship. From that point, however, the computer game and its predecessors part company. Douglas Adams has created a number of scenarios specifically for the game which will be new to even the most ardent *Hitchhiker's* fan.

This promises to be an exciting and intriguing package. The combination of Infocom's programming expertise and Adams' anarchic brand of humour should ensure the game becomes a classic.

Incidentally, for those who still don't know, the answer to the ultimate question of life, the universe and everything is 42.

LETTERS

Send your hints, successes, complaints and compliments to Letters Page, Micro Adventurer, 12-13 Little Newport St, London WC2R 3LD

Diablero

I NEED help in solving *El Diablero*. I sent to Dragon Data for a help sheet, but they went bankrupt before I got it. Can anyone let me have a copy or advice?

I wish you had more help for Dragon users. I look forward to seeing a review of Wintersoft's *Return of the Ring*, which I heartily recommend. So far, I have found your reviewer's opinions very fair!

K N Wheeler
2 Burford Close
Southdown
Bath

Campbell's lament

THANK YOU for including a review of my book, *The Computer & Video Games Book of Adventure* in your September issue. I'm glad your reviewer found it well-produced and readable, but felt, as Nicky Palmer did about the review of his book, that the readable should have been read a little more carefully.

Your reviewer seems to have missed the point of the book, the main aim of which is to be a tutorial in the logic and techniques required for writing an adventure program in Basic. The game listing in the book was described as 'notably lacking in complexity . . . with only ten locations.' The program is there purely to demonstrate the different techniques required. In fact, I kept it deliberately small, to enable me to explain the programming without blinding the reader with page upon page of listing.

Keith Campbell

Adventure file

I CAME across your magazine last November and have purchased every issue but the December one since then. I own a CBM 8096 with 8050 dual drives. This places me in a very good hardware position but a meagre software one.

I am also involved with the adventure section on Micronet but it is a non-existent task giving help to all the PET owners who have had the same adventures so long they can do them blindfold.

I enjoy your magazine very much and was sad when "Adventure file" failed to turn up a few issues back. Was this because it remained unchanged for so long (although I could not see whether there was a difference or not)? I think a better way to set it out would be to classify the adventures in computer types more like PCT and then subclassify the companies — I agree it would be more expensive in paper terms but it would also be far easier than searching through the tiny MICRO column for your computer.

Also was "Your Adventures" not present in the September issue because of lack of reader material? The length has obviously dwindled since say the November issue. If so, I hope to see a return because I enjoy converting programs but I have no programs short enough to send in.

Rupert Hulme

What do other readers think — should we bring back Your Adventures and Adventure File?

Amstrad

AFTER having owned a Lynx for a year and a half, I have bought an Amstrad. I am very interested in adventure games, and have read that many companies are converting their software for this machine.

Can you say who?

Stan Collie

and again

I AM an Amstrad CPC464 owner. To be honest, the software I have purchased so far has been rubbish. Could you find out if Beyond or houses of similar standards will be bringing out anything for the converted adventurer with no adventure to attack?

Anything exciting will do.

Peter Andrews

Level 9 are converting games for the Amstrad, and so are Kuma. For further information watch our news pages — we'll keep you informed.

Back issues

THANK you for printing my letter in June's *MAD*. However, due to a fault by my newsagent, I haven't got this issue. I am at my wit's end, as the missing of one page, let alone one issue, from my collection is sacrilege.

Do you keep a supply of back issues, and if so, how do I get hold of them? If I can get hold of June's issue, one happy reader will become very happy.

C J Harding

Yes — back issues are available from us. They cost £1.25 each including p&p. Write to 12/13 Little Newport Street, London WC2.

Ket query

I AM writing to ask how to solve the firt part of the *Ket Trilogy*, a Spectrum game called *The Mountains of Ket*. I have gone far in this game and have now reached the chamber where the Huge Zombie is. I know you have to get down the stairs to solve the game. When I reach the Zombie's chamber I have with me the following items: wand, magic luck ring and a magic sword. I am wearing the Mage's Hat, the Mage's Cloak and a false beard. I have thought of everything I can to get past the Huge Zombie but I have failed with every idea. I was hoping you could help me out of this position. I would be very grateful.

Scott Warner

You must only have with you the four magical items: the magic wand, magic ring, magic armour, and magic sword. You must drop everything else!

Machine code

I HAVE been reading your magazine for the past five months, and think it is the closest to the definitive adventurer's publication ever.

There is one small niggling point; there is no column of tips for those who want to write machine code adventures. I have put the suggestions in previous articles such as "Putting code in the picture" or "how a Hobbit's Mind Works" to good use.

Nick Tuckett

Karn coach

ANYONE having trouble with *Heroes of Karn, The Hobbit, Aztec Tomb*, or *Kingdom of Merravid* send me a stamped addressed envelope.

Here are some quickies:

To get Beren, Haldir, Istar and Khadim in *Heroes of Karn*.

Light swamp gas.

Kill vampire.

Play flute in crystal room.

When the lyre plays the spider will sleep, then open chest.

Jonathan Stone
7 Clairvale
Emerson Park
Hornchurch
Essex RM11 3NA

Planetfall

IN REPLY to Mr Farndon's letter in August's *MAD*, Infocom's *Planetfall* is an excellent piece of software. I have solved it, and *Zork I* too; I am working on *Starcross* and *Suspended*. All are state of the art, even surpassing the excellent Level 9 series.

If he is in doubt, he should try one of the *Zork* trilogy, now that the price has been reduced.

By the way, if anyone wants to write to me regarding the above adventures, I will be only too happy to help. Remember an SAE!

Nigel Morse,
11 Green Leafe Avenue,
Wheatley Hills,
Doncaster,
DN2 5RG



If you think you've something newsworthy, call 01-437 4343 and let us know

Red Shift warps time

RED SHIFT has been fairly quiet for the last few months, ever since a group of former members broke away to form the freelance group Slug. But, the company's latest releases should settle any worries about its future.

Four games were released in the current wave; *English Civil War, Islandia, Timelords,* and *City of Death.*

English Civil War is an introductory level wargame for the BBC B, Electron, and Commodore 64. Two players manoeuvre armies of pikemen and cavalry about a hexagonally gridded map, each trying to capture or destroy the other's fort. Terrain features are randomly generated, and both sides set up secretly.

Islandia is a game for two to four players, and runs on the BBC B and Electron. The program randomly generates a map showing a single large island, and a number of smaller ones.

Each of the four players can purchase steam ships, explorers and soldiers, which are then used to discover and colonise the outlying islands. Established colonies can be exploited for basic resources.

At the end of a specified number of game turns, the player with the most money in the bank is the winner.

The game was designed by Julian Gollop, of *Rebelstar Raiders* fame, and the programmer was Andrew Greene.

Timelords, for the BBC B, is a re-release. Charles Ablett of Red Shift described it as "like a game of chess with five players and an invisible board."

Two to five players can take part in the game. Each is a time travelling secret agent, or Timelord, working for one of five races.

The computer generates the history of five planets, over 15 time eras. This produces an interlocking network of branches. Each player is trying to alter the outcome of history in favour of the race which employs him or her.

Players begin by exploring the five planets and the different time eras, trying to establish what happened. They can also recruit companions who will fight with them, or search for the mystical Key of Time, which will enable them to survey all recorded history.

City of Death, for the Spectrum 48K, is an adventure game with graphics. The player has landed at the forementioned city, and must find the wizard Bellatrix, who knows the real objective of the game. The various options available will be presented on a menu.

In addition to all that, Red Shift is looking at the possibility of publishing expansion-kits for *Rebelstar Raiders,* the Science Fiction tactical game. Julian Gollop, now with Slug, has written a scenario generation program for the game, and two additional scenarios. Red Shift will either publish the extra scenarios with the original game, or with the generation program.

Red Shift also hopes to adapt the basic system to fantasy games, replacing Joe Capricorn and his valiant rebels with wizards and superheroes.

All the games will be packaged in the standard Red Shift heavy duty boxes, with full colour artwork, and will sell for £9.95.



MIDAS

SWORDS AND SORCERY is the first of a new kind of adventure, according to Gary Mays of Coventry based software house PSS.

"It was designed using our *Multi Dimensional Animation System — MIDAS* for short — which enables us to write a whole series of adventures in the same mould," he says.

Swords and Sorcery involves the exploration of an underground complex of rooms, in search of treasure (as usual, well guarded by evil creatures!). The screen is divided into three parts; one is a map of the labyrinth, another a view of the area immediately ahead of the character, and the third a text window.

Each separate game in the series will also have a number of modular expansions for it. Module one for *Swords and Sorcery* will be released in January, and will allow players to link up two micros so that they can go adventuring together.

January will also see the release of PSS's next venture in the wargames field. Called *Threatre Europe,* it will be a strategic and tactical level simulation of Third World War in Europe, set in 1985.

The player can choose between controlling NATO or the Warsaw Pact, and the computer will play the other side.

The designer and programmer is Alan Steel, who also wrote *Battle for Midway;* "he has learnt a lot from *Midway,*" Gary claims.

Swords and Sorcery is for the Spectrum 48K and Commodore 64 at £9.95. *Theatre Europe* will be for the Commodore 64 at £9.95.

Stranglehold

BOOKWARE has become a thing of the past — albumware has arrived. To celebrate their tenth anniversary, the Stranglers, those eminences grise of avant gard rock, are to include an adventure game in their next album, *Aural Sculpture.*

The game is called *Aural Quest,* and has been written by Mike Turner of Star Dreams, based on ideas from The Stranglers.

"We've used *The Quill,*" says Mike, "but I like to think we've made quite a novel use of it — it plays differently to most *Quilled* adventures I've seen."

The player has to travel around the world searching for pieces of the ear, and is helped in the quest by snatches of music and lines from Stranglers' songs.

Aural Quest is for the Spectrum 48K, and can only be obtained in conjunction with the album, *Aural Sculpture,* from Epic.

Se-Kaa of Assiah

MASTERVISION, the new label which amalgamates the talent of Mastertronic and Carnell, is publishing *Se-Kaa of Assiah*, a 96K adventure game for the Spectrum 48K.

The player must find three great artifacts to liberate the world from the evil Dark Hordes. These treasures, the Rod of Light, the Hammer of Vib-ra, and the Casket of Vib-ra, are hidden in the Castle of the Dead. The game costs £7.50.

Mastervision has also re-released the three parts of the *Third Continent* series, the classic games originally put out by Carnell Software. *Wrath of Magra* is £12.50, *Black Crystal* is £7.50, and *Volcanic Dungeon* is £5.00. All three run on the Spectrum 48K.

Mastervision also plans to release another *Third Continent* adventure, *The Legacy of Light*, sometime in the spring.

In addition, Mastervision hopes to have the three existing *Third Continent* games ready for the Commodore 64 by Christmas.

Starweb

INTERNATIONAL Computers by Mail (ICBM for short), the Walsall based PBM company who operates from an iron foundry, hope to bring the classic game *Starweb* to this country in January.

UK players can already play *Starweb* through ICBM's mailboxing system, where they collect orders every two weeks and send them to the US for processing. But, according to Chris Harvey, ICBM's managing director, the turnaround can be reduced from 10 to two days when the game becomes UK based.

Starweb is a limited duration game, with a limited number of players, and is, according to Harvey, "the most popular Science Fiction PBM game in business." Plans are afoot to run *Starweb* as a bulletin board game some time in 1985 — which will reduce turnaround to minutes rather than days.

Who's next? The Tripods!

DOCTOR WHO and the War-lords is the title of a new adventure game being published by the BBC's own software division.

According to Meyer Solomon, BBC Software Editor, the program is being validated now, and should be released in January. Text only, it is in two parts, and runs on the Spectrum 48K.

The player is one of the Doctor's sidekicks, and must negotiate the perils of an alien planet in search of the Tardis. The Doctor pops up every so often and is his usual scatter-brained self.

Once the Tardis has been found, the action switches to the battle of Waterloo, where the player will meet various historical personages.

The ultimate aim is to defeat the machinations of an evil warlock, out to change history.

Doctor Who is not the only BBC series that will be appearing as an adventure game. The BBC has granted the software rights for *The Tripods* to Red Shift.

The game will be a strategy/adventure featuring text and graphics, and using landscaping techniques along the lines of those seen in *Lords of Midnight*.



Puffin's Tripods trilogy.

The player must travel from Winchester to the White Mountains avoiding Tripods and the Black Guards.

There will be three maps, each 32 by 64 squares in area. Within each map will be separate text adventures covering actions within cities, ports, and so on.

Red Shift will be releasing *The Tripods* in November, at £9.95.

Forsyth's Saga

HUTCHINSON, who has just launched the *Lone Wolf* software packages (reviewed page 38), announced a coup at the Frankfurt Book Fair at the beginning of October. The company will be releasing an adventure game based on Frederick Forsyth's latest best seller, *The Fourth Protocol*.

The game has been designed by John Lambshead and Gordon Paterson, the team responsible for *Legend* from Century, and programming will be by the Electronic Pencil Company. It will be a text and graphics adventure, and will run on the Commodore 64 and Spectrum 48K. It will be released in May of 1985. No price has been fixed.

Doug Fox, Hutchinson Computer Publisher's General Manager, confirms that the company will be producing software in conjunction with major titles published by their traditional book side.

"Our objective is to back up our books with high-quality software. We hope to publish between six and eight packages a year, and we intend to proceed with caution — we only want top name stuff."

Hitchhiker

AN ADVENTURE game based on *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* is to be released by Infocom in the States in November.

The game has been written by Steve Meretzky.

It will be available for a wide variety of micros; for UK readers, the important names are Commodore 64 and Plus 4, TI 99/4A, Apple II and Atari. Disc based, it will retail in the US at $39.95.

Swordware

STEVE JACKSON has signed a deal with Mike Woodruffe of Adventure International UK to produce a series of *Fighting Fantasy* type bookware products. Called *Steve Jackson's Swordmaster Series*, the games will consist of a full length paperback book and a computer tape.

Valkyrie

THE RAM JAM Corporation is a new independent software house, being marketed by Palace.

The group's first game is *Valkyrie 17*, a text and graphic adventure involving the player in a hunt for a pair of ageing Nazis intent on building a super weapon and holding the world to ransom.

RAM JAM CORPORATION PRESENTS VALKYRIE

Before the game starts, the player listens to five messages which help create the right sort of atmosphere.

George Stone of Ram Jam says the group's inspiration is the text adventures put out by Infocom.

The next game from Ram Jam will be called *Three Days in Carpathia*, and will come complete with a guide book to the delights of this small Balkan country.

Valkyrie 17 is for the Spectrum 48K, and costs £9.99.



BECOME LONE WOLF...

... sole survivor of a devastating attack on the monastery of Kai.

A great cloud of black winged beasts has swept down and engulfed the monastery. All the Kai Lords, whose secret skills you were learning, have been killed.

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You swear

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Over the centuries, the Kai Lords had mastered the skills of the warrior. As you proceed through your adventure you may find that you are becoming more and more proficient. If you, too, have mastered these skills they may save your life!



You can learn how to hide undetected amongst rocks and trees of the countryside. In a city, you can look and sound like a native which may help you to find shelter.

Learn how to communicate with animals and move objects by sheer concentration alone.

You can develop a "Sixth Sense" that warns you of imminent danger. It may also reveal the true nature of a stranger.

"Tracking" may help you choose the right path and decipher prints or tracks of creatures in the wild.

Great Scott!

Mike Woodruffe of AI UK fixed it for **Ken Matthews** *to meet his greatest hero, Scott Adams — and playtest a prototype version of Spiderman*

THOSE OF YOU who were unable to visit this year's PCW show missed a rare treat — the second visit to Britain of Scott Adams, the Chief Adventurer himself. He was on the Adventure International stand giving hints to those confounded by his classics, and proudly displaying *Spiderman* — the second of the *Questprobe* adventures.

Scott is a tall, soft spoken man with an easy smile, obviously happy in the company of his own 'True Believers'. He once worked as a professional programmer for a Florida company before coming home one day to announce to his wife Alexis that he had quit his job to go it alone. Was she angry? You bet your life she was! But she quickly rallied to support Scott as he typed away on his TRS-80 (the machine he still uses to originate his games) producing the first version of *Adventureland*. The project almost died in its infancy when Alexis nearly 'baked' the disk in protest over the hours Scott spent on his creation. Fortunately, she was once again won over and *Adventureland* was launched into a waiting world in 1978. Scott's gamble, of course, paid off and the business quickly outgrew mail order sales to become Adventure International which now resides in tranquil surroundings near Longwood, Florida. The purpose designed facility even boasts a fountain (like the one in *Claymorgue Castle?*).

Adventureland was Scott's first and remains an evergreen introduction to the genre for any beginner. Scott did tell me a hilarious anecdote about the bear, sent by a couple of American fans, but I had to promise not to repeat it in a family magazine like *Micro Adventurer*.

Pirate Adventure never quite worked as far as Scott is concerned, "It's just too easy" he said. It was my first introduction to adventure though, and I would recommend it to any beginner. I'm sure the would-be mongoose has given a belly laugh to many other adventures and the true purpose of the parrot is Scott's salute to Crowther and Woods *Colossal Cave*. The forthcoming *Return to Pirate Island* is a follow-up and Scott promises it won't be easy!

Detail abounds in *Secret Mission*, to both give clues and mislead. Things drop neatly into place as you progress and find the dead saboteur has the documents missing from the briefing pack — albeit in pieces! The one loose end Scott tied up for me was the empty pill case — was it a heart attack, or was it suicide? "He expected to get out" said Scott "But his pills and his luck ran out."

He laughed openly as he mentioned a lady in America who thought she wasn't getting far in *The Count* as she couldn't get the dumb-waiter to talk! Of course we Brits wouldn't be that silly (dumb?) would we?



Scott and Spiderman

Those puzzled by the locked doors in *Mystery Fun House* need fret no more, "They are simply the doors the staff use...you wouldn't expect them to bounce about on trampolines and swim with mermaids would you?" he said.

On the subject of other adventures Scott said he had played *Colossal Cave* and *Zork* on a main-frame, but never plays other people's adventures, "to ensure I'm not influenced by them and my adventures remain totally original creations." He had, of course, heard of *The Hobbit* and commented that Tolkien's books were "great stories".

Scott was more interested in the command analysers originated by Infocom that guess the meaning of sentences and allow excellent player/program interaction. I was happy that he shared my belief that time wasted searching for exact wording detracts from the true spirit of adventuring — solving puzzles. "I always try to ensure my database can understand as many versions of the correct command as I can think of" he commented.

SPIDERMAN is the second of Scott Adams' _Questprobe_ adventures, featuring the world of Marvel Comics, and is due for release this month.

The first in the series featured the Incredible Hulk and received a mixed reception from press and public alike. According to Scott, _The Hulk_ is the first of a series of at least twelve adventures and represented a 'first adventure' for many Marvel fans who buy _Questprobe_ to discover what happened to the Hulk after passing through the Chief Examiner's portal in the comic. For this reason the adventure had to be simple and small enough for the beginner, but with enough challenges to appeal to existing Scott Adams fans.

However, the best answer to _Hulk_ critics comes from the pen of the master himself in the form of _Questprobe 2 — SPIDERMAN!_

This superb adventure launches Scott's new command analyser which can handle full sentences and guess at the meaning of incomplete commands. "Old hat now," you may say but believe me, the system seems designed so that you will have to use it to its full capabilities to succeed. My development copy understood the largest range of complex or personal nouns, adjectives and prepositions I have found outside of Infocom adventures — even gems like "go all the way up" were readily understood. Scott told me he still had 2K of database left for any actions, found during playtesting, he feels should be understood by the system.

The game is set in a deserted office building which is vaguely familiar to Spidey. Once again the task is to collect gems and store them in the right place but those who found _The Hulk_ a breeze will find things a lot different here. I only found three gems that were immediately visible and you are likely to solve much of the adventure before you come across the rest.

Armed, initially, with only the inate powers of Spider-sense and Spider-strength, you, as Spiderman, must tackle old rivals in the forms of Sandman, Lizard and Hydroman. Finding the chemicals and formula to replenish your web fluid are only part of this very tricky adventure.

Those of you who, like me, were frustrated by the random 'Fuzzy Area' in _The Hulk_ will be pleased to know that mapping _Spiderman_ is straightforward — well almost!

Fortunately your ally Madame Web is available to aid you by using her precognitive powers, and your spider-strength comes in handy more than once. The first class database allows much better interaction between you and the characters.

Information on the villains of the story, given on separate sheets, will allow non-Marvel fans to get full pleasure from the adventure and perhaps some clues on how to defeat trickier opponents such as Mysterio, with his power of illusion, and the Ringmaster, whose evil genius has allowed him to command lesser mortals to obey his every whim. Ringmaster is so confident he will even tell you how to defeat himself — it's doing it that's tricky!

The overall impression I get of the adventure is one of subtlety. Careful thought and attention to any details given are necessary to get very far at all — let alone locate the maze (Scott's most fiendish to date!). I really missed the graphics I'd seen on a fully working IBM PC copy since I'm sure there were a few items shown not listed in location descriptions that, if not immediately useful, seemed to suggest things you might find elsewhere. You really need your wits about you with _Spiderman_.

It seems to me that, having introduced the series, Scott is back to doing his own thing and, if this is a taste of what's to come, those who can survive the rest of the series should be proud indeed. I am sure the Helplines will be buzzing with this one for quite a while. I wholeheartedly recommend it — I had tremendous fun playing _Spiderman_ — which is what it's all about after all.

I would like to thank two young adventurous Marvel fans, Simon Crowe and Martin Viner of Pollards Hill who gave me a lift and a lot of background on the villains of the piece. They and other Marvel fans might be interested to know that _Questprobes_ three and four will feature the Fantastic Four. With Scott in charge it'll soon be "Clobberin' Time!" for many of us micro-adventurers.


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The Lords of Midnight

Julie Lewis leads the armies of the Free to victory in the struggle against the hordes of the evil Doomdark

THERE is little doubt in my mind and, I suspect, in those of most of you reading this article that *The Lords of Midnight* is one of the most exciting games currently available for the Spectrum.

Having completed (to date) four quests and one military defeat, I am writing this article in the hope of helping those of you who are still struggling desperately against Doomdark and his hordes.

There are 32 main characters in the game and these will be listed at the end of the article. Suggestions as to where they may be found will be given as we go along.

As I have had more experience of success with the quest, it is this aspect of the game which I shall deal with first. You will no doubt be aware that this is the quickest way to defeat Doomdark — it is also the easiest. However, it is possibly not the most satisfying!

On reading the booklet included with the cassette, you will have been told (p. 21, para. 3) that "Morkin can have no army to help him on his journey . . ."; this, however, is not strictly true. Admittedly, Morkin cannot recruit any men to assist him, but he can be *accompanied* by an army — there is a subtle difference here, and I suspect Beyond of being not unintentionally misleading when writing those words!

When Morkin starts out on his journey, he should travel N-W-NW-NE. This will bring him, in exactly one day, to the Lord of Shadows, who can be recruited to his aid. Do not, however, move Shadows at this point (in any case, he is always 'slightly tired' when you reach him, but don't ask me what he's been up to in that forest!)

You may think that it would be more sensible to take a more direct route to Shadows, which would be a combination of three moves North and one West, but this would involve Morkin in the risk of being killed by wolves or skulkrin (he is not particularly good at overcoming the latter, especially, unless armed). The directions I have given are, therefore, the safest. You will find that it is sometimes preferable to take slightly longer routes occasionally when directing a single character, unless they have with them a sword such as Dragonslayer or Wolfslayer (incidentally, each sword will kill all three kinds of creatures, not just the one it is named after). A single character should always take an available sword rather than the leader of an army — if 2,400 warriors and riders can't kill a few wolves, they are't going to be much use when the real fun starts!

Because you have recruited the Lord of Shadows, Morkin's journey will be less hazardous insofar as wolves, dragons and skulkrin are concerned. Shadows and his 1,000 warriors can go ahead of Morkin and kill them all. However, Shadows is not at all as successful when it comes to fighting Doomdark's minions — when situated at a keep he can usually hold his own for one night, but without such protection, or the support of other armies, he can easily lose all his men in one go (sometimes himself as well, which would be a pity, because he's probably most anxious to return to whatever — or whoever — is waiting for him in that forest!)

Anyway; to continue . . . On the second day, you should direct Morkin and his protecting band North-easterly to the Keep of Dodrak. Here, if you're lucky, they will be able to spend a night without encountering Doomdark. Shadows and his men should refresh themselves here (Morkin will not need this facility yet). Remember that whatever benefits (or otherwise!) are offered by ruins, liths, and so on, can only be taken advantage of once — do not put 'utterly invigorated' troops into a lake when you also command an army which is tiring.

On the third day, three moves North will take the travellers into the Mountains of Dodrak, and from here, on the fourth day, you will, on moving slightly North again towards the Plains of Ogrim, see two groups of mountains ahead of you. Position yourself so you can see a Tower in each of these directions, and aim for the one on the right. This will lead you to the Ruin of Coroth, where Morkin can recruit Farflame the Dragonlord. At this point, it doesn't matter too much if Shadows loses his army (which he may well do, as Doomdark arrives here at about the same time) because Farflame is an excellent fighter and can easily kill up to 450 men in one go, which is more than Shadows and his warriors can manage! As a matter of fact, it can be an actual advantage later on if Shadows does find himself without an army . . .

If, when leaving Coroth, you find yourself being pursued by Doomdark's men, proceed North to the Forest of Lothoril, where Morkin will be able to seek the assistance of the Lord of Lothoril. Do not stay here too long, however, as the enemy will arrive within a day or two. If you are concentrating on a military defeat, you should leave Lothoril at his keep so you can remain aware of what is going on there — Doomdark is unlikely to return once Morkin has left.

Once past the Keep of Lothoril, you are *almost* home and dry . . .

On your way to the Tower of Doom (no, I am not going to give you directions!) let anyone without a sword collect Dragonslayer at the Cavern of Death, and whoever is most in need of refreshment acquire this at the Cavern of Despair. You needn't take the Lord of Shadows on this last lap. He will only attract attention if he still has his army, and if he hasn't he is of no use anyway. Once you reach the Tower, Morkin should SEEK. Then, as long as the right person is with him, just press the Night button, and — voila!

If Farflame is dead when you reach Coroth (check he hasn't been forced to move slightly by Doomdark) you can either go towards the Frozen Wastes and recruit Fawkrin the Skulkrin at Moonhenge (whatever you do, do not SEEK here — you've been warned!) or go straight to the Tower of Doom and steal the Ice Crown.

If you choose the latter course, you then have two choices. You can either go towards the NE end of the Frozen Wastes and recruit Lorgrim the Wise or send Morkin to Lake Mirrow (S from the Keep of Lothoril). The second alternative is probably the easiest, as the Tower of Lorgrim is difficult to locate, and Doomdark has lookout armies posted at various strategic points along the Wastes.

If you wish to take the Ice Crown but not destroy it, in order to concentrate on the military defeat, place Morkin in the Citadel of Gloom (NW corner of Frozen Wastes). Doomdark rarely attacks here more than once, and if you HIDE a single character in

the snowhall on the Plains of the Lost (this is where an armyless Shadows can come in handy) you can easily see when an army is approaching and temporarily move Morkin out of the Citadel into the Mountains of Gloom (just move North a couple of times). Of course, you then run the risk of Doomdark's men going straight to Morkin and attacking him, so if he is fairly energetic it may be safer to stay in the Citadel and let the Lord of Gloom (who should, of course, be recruited) protect him — Morkin can survive several battles as long as he is not exhausted.

Do not worry about the fact that the Lord of Gloom is 'utterly afraid' when in his Citadel. For some reason, as soon as he takes one step out of it he brightens up considerably, and he will fight. Once more, it seems as if Beyond are pulling a fast one — but I didn't waste my time sending commanders all the way to the Citadel of Gloom to take over Gloom's men!

Finally, it is worth mentioning that you should always keep Morkin and his 'guards' together — Farflame, for instance, can travel as far in one hour as Morkin can in a day over flat ground, but don't fall into the deliberate trap set by Beyond by letting him go on ahead. If by any chance Morkin and Farflame (for instance) are separated, send the latter to the Tower of Doom, or some location on the way which you can find easily, and HIDE them there until Morkin catches up.

Now for the military defeat!

According to Mike Singleton, the creator of *Midnight*, it is more or less impossible to take Ushgarak before Xajorkith falls, so you may as well take all available men off

LUXOR THE MOONPRINCE
He stands in the
Plains of Despair,
looking South to the
Citadel of Ushgarak.

Ushgarak has fallen Victory to
the Free!

the citadels and keeps (including Xajorkith) in order to build up your armies, rather than leaving them for Doomdark to wantonly destroy (in fact, Mike himself also recommends this strategy).

Send Luxor SE twice and then S to the Citadel of Gard. SEEKing at the Lith of Gard will earn him an extra day's travelling, and doing the same at the Lith of the Moon or Mitharg will arm him with the very useful sword Wolfslayer. Another of these useful weapons is available at the Citadel of Gard.

Continuing on his way, Luxor should travel E to Brith, SE to Rorath, E to Thimrath and Xajorkith, and North through Dregrim to Ithrorn, via Utarg and Kumar. It is a good idea to keep him without armies at this stage, as he will move quicker and be safer, and you can easily provide him with the full quota of 1,200 riders and the same number of warriors by allowing 'utterly afraid' and 'very afraid' characters to drop men on keeps and citadels in the North and letting Luxor (and other brave commanders) collect them when they arrive.

Corleth the Fey should go straight to the Forest of Kor and then to Dreams, via the Keep of Blood (four N and straight E, in any combination to avoid danger). He also may be better off without an army, as the journey from Kor to Dreams is a hazardous one. Waste no time in arriving at the Village of Kor, as Doomdark arrives there early.

Rorthron the Wise should aim for the Citadel of Shimeril (South easterly) and thence to the Village of Thrall, the Keep of Herath (Doomdark arrives here early, too), the Citadels of Marakith and Kumar, and the Keep of Utarg. Very few characters can recruit the Utarg — Rothron is one, the Lord of Dregrim is another, and Luxor sometimes can, usually if he assists him in bastle. Note, however, that the reverse doesn't always apply — Utarg doesn't seem able to recruit Dregrim, for instance.

The other commanders can recruit the remaining Lords — Rorath or Brith can collect Morning, Shimeril can recruit Mitharg and Morning can recruit Dawn and Athoril. Keep smaller armies together rather than splitting them up.

Note that the size of an army doesn't necessarily indicate how well it will do in battle. Thimrath the Fey, for instance, has a relatively small army, yet he can quite easily take three keeps in succession and lose very few men. Generally speaking, the armies of the Fey seem to be worth the equivalent of an army double the size commanded by a Lord of the Free.

Rothron and Corleth can take part in battles when they are invigorated if their assistance is needed. Rorthron, for example, can put paid to around 125 Foul in one go when 'utterly invigorated' — indeed, I found on one occasion that using this rather worn-looking old man to assist a Lord in trouble actually meant the difference between victory and defeat!

Send all your armies in a Northerly direction to the Citadel of Ithrorn via the Forest of Whispers. Stay at Ithrorn until all your armies are together and fully recuperated from their journeys. Attack from Doomdark at this stage of the game is unlikely. There are a fair number of keeps and villages around Ithrorn where you can speed up your armies' recoveries, and several lakes along the top of the Frozen Wastes, which you can use as you approach Ushgarak from the rear, gathering overnight in the Forest of Doom. ►



The 32 characters inhabiting the Lands of Midnight are listed below:

Main Characters
LUXOR THE MOONPRINCE
MORKIN
CORLETH THE FEY
RORTHRON THE WISE

'Quest' Characters
FARFLAME THE DRAGONLORD
FAWKRIN THE SKULKRIN
LORGRIM THE WISE

Lords of the Free

(Citadels)
LORD OF DAWN
LORD OF GARD
LORD OF GLOOM
LORD OF ITHRORN
LORD OF KUMAR
LORD OF MARAKITH
LORD OF SHIMERIL
LORD OF XAJORKITH

(Keeps)
LORD ATHORIL
LORD BLOOD
LORD BRITH
LORD HERATH
LORD MITHARG
LORD MORNING
LORD RORATH
LORD TRORN

Lords of the Fey

(Citadels)
LORD OF DREAMS
LORD OF WHISPERS

(Keeps)
LORD OF DREGRIM
KORINEL THE FEY
LORD OF LOTHORIL
LORD OF SHADOWS
THIMRATH THE FEY
LORD OF THRALL

Others
(Keeps)
THE UTARG OF UTARG



The defence of Xajorkith

Geoff Lyas successfully defeated Doomdark by defending Xajorkith — here's how.

THE COUNCIL of the Wise is dissolved. The War has begun.

Rorthron travels East, hurriedly rallying Lords to the Cause, his ultimate goal to guide the Lords Ithrorn and Marakith to the safety of Lorgrim's Tower, there to remain until the final assault on Ushgarak.

Morkin, accompanied by Corleth, is despatched North-West to seek refuge in the Citadel of Gloom. From this vantage point he effectively neutralises the Ice Fear throughout the entire campaign.

Luxor speeds southwards to recruit Lord Gard and thence to the Icy Wastes. Five days of Eastward travel brings him safely to Xajorkith followed closely by Lord Rorath and Thimrath the Fey.

As each Lord is mobilised he in turn calls up his neighbour and all follow their predetermined routes unswervingly towards the assembly at Xajorkith. By the eighth day Morkin completes his hazardous journey. The end of the second week marks the gathering of sixteen footsore armies in the Citadel of Xajorkith and on the Plains of Corelay. The vigil begins . . .

Three days pass before the first of Doomdark's many armies arrives, hurls itself at the Citadel walls and is completely destroyed. For forty days the assaults continue with the same results on each occasion until on the sixtieth day of the war the Forces of Darkness are spent.

Luxor selects his four strongest Marshals and together they march irresistibly Northwards. . .

Conclusions

The campaign ended with the fall of Ushgarak on the eighty-sixth day with no loss of Lordly life. The following observations may hold the key . . .

Doomdark has two weapons, the Ice Fear and his many armies.

Morkin attracts the Ice Fear.

Morkin is safe in the Northwest. Xajorkith is in the Southeast.

Doomdark has a finite number of men, and must garrison captured Keeps and Citadels of which there are many between Ushgarak and Xajorkith.

Once an army is in garrison it may no longer move.

A significantly outnumbered offensive or defensive army is annihilated with no loss to the opposition.

Doomdark's forces attack as soon as they have a target. They do not wait to gather strength.

You should now take the two keeps near the Citadel of Ushgarak — place half your armies in each keep, balancing them equally for size. Put the not-so-brave commanders and their men in the same keep as Luxor, and let them fight alongside him — they'll perform better. Your men can remain in these keeps until they are all 'utterly invigorated' if you wish, Doomdark will not risk attacking such numbers. From one keep, take half your armies and move West once to the Citadel. From the other keep, take half again and move N-N-NW. Attack Ushgarak and, if necessary, return to the keeps and continue with fresh armies. Use the lakes and villages around the Citadel when refreshment is needed. The Citadel nearest to the furthest keep can be attacked and taken if you wish. Then move straight back into the keep, let Doomdark reclaim the Citadel, and attack and take it again — I slaughtered about 10,000 Foul nasties that way (needless to say, Doomdark didn't risk another attempt!) Don't waste energy doing this, however, if you are seriously attempting to take Ushgarak before Doomdark takes Xajorkith (if you manage it, let Mike Singleton know how you did it!)

Also, you should avoid marching on Ushgarak until Morkin has possession of the Ice Crown — unless, of course, you're trying to prove something!

You will probably find, as I did, that one night's fighting is all it takes if you have already stolen the Ice Crown and Xajorkith has long fallen into enemy hands. (It's the shock, you see, they thought they'd dispos-



ed of your lot and were busy celebrating . . .!). Actually, I was rather disappointed to find it so easy — I only lost five men (honestly!) and I had so many armies I couldn't even put them all into battle! So much for the ding-dong affair I'd been building up to in the three months since the Solstice had begun (yes, it did take me that long, but the shock to Doomdark was probably greater because of it!). Obviously, the longer it takes you to reach Ushgarak, the more of Doomdark's men you will have to overcome, as more and more armies keep arriving from Xajorkith; but I disposed of about 20,000 in that one night, so I wouldn't worry too much if you're at it for a year!

Incidentally, never try to put too many armies into any one battle. It is better to lose a few of your men and kill the majority of Doomdark's army rather than scaring them off — your army will tire but won't kill anyone!

Doomdark has three kinds of armies — attackers, defenders and what Mike Singleton calls 'hunters'. The first two varieties are self-explanatory; the third are programmed to follow certain characters, such as Luxor and Morkin. If these armies are involved in battle they will immediately withdraw if they see the character they are programmed to hunt, and start after them. This is why it is essential to use the HIDE facility whenever danger is anticipated. (Yes, I know things would be a whole lot simpler if Morkin could HIDE, but would you really like it that easy!)

The key to success in this marvellous game, especially where the quest is concerned, is to make full use of the SAVE facility. You should SAVE prior to entering into any battles which have a doubtful outcome, and *always* before moving Morkin, at least from day three onwards. Then, if you lose your battle, or Morkin encounters danger or is killed, you can re-load your saved game as often as is necessary to achieve success in battle or safety for Morkin before allowing Night to fall. It is worth adding here that the first time you enter into a battle you will kill more men than on immediately subsequent attempts (after a while, however, the total will creep up again) so be prepared for the fact that if you have to re-stage a battle because Morkin was killed, you will not do so well when using your saved game, unless you continue re-loading until an acceptable level is reached.

The Lords of Midnight has only one or two 'faults'. The most inconvenient is something which seems like a bug in the program but, according to Mr Singleton, probably isn't (I don't think he's telling!). Basically, what happens is that if you prefer to play a defensive game and try to place more than 1,200 men in a citadel, you will find that most of them disappear inside, never to return (well, I suppose there have to be some women somewhere in this Land!). As an example, Xajorkith will have 750 riders in it when you arrive. You can place 400 more into it, but if you exceed this number you will lose 1,000 and not get them back.

My only other 'complaint' concerns the rather feeble victory announcements. Bleeps and flashing lights would have been out of place, I admit, but what does finally appear is something of an anti-climax after all the blood, sweat and tears!

As things are supposed to come in threes, I'll also have a little moan about the fact that the keyboard overlay seems to have a will entirely of its own.

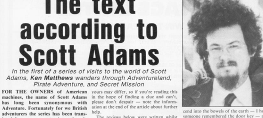
Enjoy yourselves in the Land of Midnight, but don't look for me there. As soon as I'm utterly invigorated I'll be joining Tarithel the Fey on her journey *beyond* the Frozen Wastes to rescue Morkin.

Hold on there, son, I'll soon have you out of there, Doomdark's daughter doesn't frighten *me*. (Why does that boy always expect me to get him out of trouble?)

OUR *Midnight* competition in September's *MAD* was won by G W Harrison of Kettering. He correctly named all the Lords and Citadels of Midnight, and listed the four ways to destroy the Ice Crown.

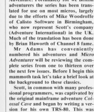
He also let us have a look at his 40" × 30" map of Midnight — we had hoped to reproduce it here, but it was just too big! Luckily, H Douglas of Belfast also sent us a map, from which we were able to print an excerpt. It appears above.


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The text according to Scott Adams

*In the first of a series of visits to the world of Scott Adams, **Ken Matthews** wanders through Adventureland, Pirate Adventure, and Secret Mission*



FOR THE OWNERS of American machines, the name of Scott Adams has long been synonymous with Adventure. Fortunately for we British adventurers the series has been translated for use on most micros, largely due to the efforts of Mike Woodroffe of Calisto Software in Birmingham, who now represent Scott's company (Adventure International) in the UK. Much of the translation has been done by Brian Haworth of Channel 8 fame.

Mr Adams has conveniently numbered his adventures and *Micro Adventurer* will be reviewing the complete series from one to thirteen over the next few issues. Before I begin this mammoth task let's take a brief look at the background to these classics.

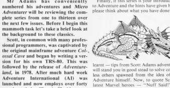
Scott, in common with many professional programmers, was captivated by the original mainframe adventure *Colossal Cave* and began by writing a version for his own TRS-80. This was followed by the release of *Adventureland*, in 1978. After much hard work Adventure International (AI) was launched and now employs over forty people at their offices in Florida.

Scott lives in Orlando, Florida with his wife Alexis and three young children. He still writes all his programs at home on his faithful TRS-80 — after 7.30 when the kids have gone to bed — so there's hope for the rest of us! The original twelve adventures were all text but graphic versions are available for some machines. All Scott Adams adventures use the verb/noun, two word command but lose none of their appeal or complexity for that. Those of you reading this without having seen or heard of these adventures might notice many similarities in plot or problems with other British and US products, but be assured — Scott's adventures are the original inspiration.

One point I would like you to note before reading the rest of this batch of "hint-reviews" is that they do not represent solutions to the adventures so much as a detailed overview of each game as a whole, with hints at, or for, the major problems as I see them. Obviously, my idea of a problem and yours may differ, so if you're reading this in the hope of finding a clue and can't, please don't despair — note the information at the end of the article about further help.

The reviews below were written whilst playing through the adventures and I have refrained from giving details of locations or most objects, not to confound but to leave plenty for you, the adventurer, to discover — particularly those of you that, I hope, are following through by playing the game with this at your side.

Finally, if this series is your introduction to Adventure and the hints have given help, please think about what you have done and

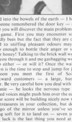


learnt — tips from Scott Adams adventures will stand you in good stead to solve countless others spawned from the idea of Mr Adventure himself. Now, to quote Scott's latest Marvel heroes — "Nuff Said!" — down to business.

Adventureland

This is the first of the series and drops the adventurer right into a forest with exits in all directions. Happily, escape is one move away and you find yourself tiptoeing past a sleeping dragon — you're unarmed and a little too ripe for roasting at the moment to tackle him! You may now arrive safely at the lake shore to find a useful, if rusty, magical axe and some tantalisingly elusive fish. Using the power of the ox — sorry — axe! the first treasure is gained and, hopefully, lost? Things are going swimmingly! A visit to the top of a bottomless hole may spark your imagination and it soon becomes clear that Paul's Place is not a fish and chip shop! Where to go next? Another overview might help you find your way into the main part of the adventure.

So far, so good — a place to store the hard-won *TREASURE* and you've found the brass lamp that is the good companion to all adventurers. Steadily you descend into the bowels of the earth — I hope someone remembered the door key — and here you will discover the main problems of the game. First you may encounter some deadly bees but the fact that they are only used to sniffing pleasant odours may be help enough to bottle their anger or steal their honey! Talking to the brick wall won't get you through it and me gasbagging won't help either — or will it? Once the wall is down is the time to stop and jump for joy!



Soon you meet the first of Scott's awkward customers — a large, hungry bear. Be very careful how you deal with this meanie — he looks the nervous type and raised voices might push him over the edge! Your score will be building nicely now with six treasures in your collection, but don't let go of the mirror unless you've something soft for it to land on — seven years bad luck is the last thing you need at the moment.

More confident now you might go and tackle the maze of pits. Remember it's warm down there, so you could take a drink along. Fortunately each part of ▶





◀ the 'maze' is different and you find it's a veritable gold mine of treasure and information. Two treasures are there for the taking — one of them will help you land a third — and there's a giveaway clue for two more. You're sure there's something in the damned lava, if only you could get to it! The only real snag is how to get out of the maze — Aladdin might have wished for a magic carpet — or similar!

Well that's about it — Oh Yes! — the dragon? The mirror gives the clue to that but it could bee you don't need it. There is a way to finish it in two moves but I'll leave that to you.

Adventureland is rated by AI as moderately difficult but typing 'Help' usually gives a useful clue and I think the game should suit beginner and master alike.

Pirate Adventure

Pirate Adventure starts you off in your London flat with a bottle of rum and a sack of crackers — just the items for a quiet evening at home — but of course that's not quite the idea and staying sober is essential for what Mr Adams has in store. Upstairs you find a book that suggests your task, to recover Long John Silver's two treasures from Treasure Island, and reveals the way to more items to help with the mission.

Getting into the mood and yoho-ing everywhere you suddenly find yourself whisked to a tropical beach — but the place is called Pirate Island. Still I'm sure you knew it wouldn't be that simple! Some parts of a boat are evident and it seems likely that if you want to get to Treasure Island you'd best get busy.

You will soon find yourself in a grass hut, faced by a mean and thirsty pirate. There is a talkative parrot of course, who quickly depletes your food supply but his quips seem useful and fair exchange etc. More of a problem is a locked chest so you set off in search of some keys.

In a maze of caves you find some hungry crocodiles and a locked door — no help there. You might make your next step to cracking the adventure at the top of the Island where, lightly armed, you discover several useful items but a couple of them won't go where you want them — another locked door? — the keys are essential now! Here you get your first view of Treasure Island. It looks too far to swim but you can try if you like.

Clawing your way back to the flat you discover that the keys were there all the time. Thank goodness you found them — the Master Adventurer would have had you on the carpet if you hadn't. Perhaps you should search the rest of the flat to see what else you've overlooked, before returning to the island.

Soon you'll have your map and plans and this should help bolster you up to tackle those crocs. Be brave, don't lose your bottle. At last! Your ship is built and its time to collect your well-rested crew and cast off for Treasure Island. Don't forget your pets and anything else you think could be useful.

After a brief but restful cruise you step ashore. If you've kept pace this far, the rest should be pretty simple but you could bear in mind that Pirate's parrots can be pretty pugilistic. Finally don't be impatient to open your present — can't you wait till you get home?

Pirate Adventure is the easiest of Scott's classics and I thoroughly recommend it to anyone as a first step in adventure. Scott himself, though, was a little dissatisfied with it and the forthcoming Adventure 14 is a follow-up to it.

Secret Mission

This is the third title of the series. It's original title, *Mission Impossible*, had to be changed after objections from the company which made the TV series. It is the first of the games where you have a goal to achieve rather than treasures to collect. In this case you must save a nuclear plant from a saboteur's bomb.

You begin this task in the briefing room of the plant alongside a heavy tape recorder. Playing the tape makes your mission clear but the envelope of goodies mentioned in the briefing is missing — you might suspect the character who keeps popping his head around the door! At this point you may notice that a device has been implanted in your brain — as if you didn't have enough headaches already!

Careful exploration of the areas you can get to should reveal a network of coloured passages, a plastic bucket and, most interesting of all, a control console that seems linked to the security system. Like me you will probably spend ages at this location. First red with rage as nothing seems to hap-



pen, then white with fear as the bug in your head wails alarmingly. Perhaps by now you have heard a dull thud and go off to investigate. An empty pill case shows that perhaps not only the saboteur's mind was sick — or was it suicide? However, the deed is done and your map and information are in pieces but the villain has left a clue and you can now progress to the visitors' room. Providing you keep the right company a little excusable vandalism might lead the way to the next part of the adventure.

Foiled again! A lot of hard work and it looks as if all you're equipped to do is clean the place up. Even the old mop looks a little shaky. If you've got the console sorted out by now, all areas will be open to you and you can take out pent up frustration on a reluctant door, only to find that it's your fault it wouldn't open in the first place.

Caution is essential when dealing with bombs and such so make sure you're relaxed before getting down to it — take in a movie or something. A final word — you don't have long with the bomb so make sure everything is ready and in the right place or you may get a shock!

This adventure is rated as Advanced by AI but I feel this may be an overstatement. The main trick is in using the console safely and I've left that to you! As an adventure with a purpose, *Mission* is very enjoyable and an excellent introduction to Scott's more abstract works like *Ghost Town* and the fiendish *Savage Island*. One point though — my BBC version was numbered 4 but this is a printing error: *Secret Mission* is Adventure 3 and *Voodoo Castle* is Adventure 4. I hope this stops any confusion.

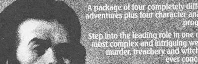
That's it for this month but if you've not found an answer to your problems write in or phone our Adventureline on 01-646 4441 for immediate relief on any Scott Adams (and many other) adventures.

Next month we look at *Voodoo Castle*, *The Count* and *Strange Odyssey* and in following months we'll be covering the rest of the series — so pop out and get them now! ☐

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A seven per cent solution?

***John Fraser** gets on the track of the world's greatest detective*

MELBOURNE HOUSE has acquired a formidable reputation as the publisher of some of the most innovative adventures around. Now, after 15 months work, Philip Mitchell and his team have finally completed their most ambitious game yet, a graphic adventure which recreates the world of fiction's most famous detective, Sherlock Holmes.

Sherlock utilises much the same techniques that made *The Hobbit* such a success: real-time action, interactive characters and a vocabulary so large that one can communicate with them in ordinary English sentences. As if that wasn't enough, it's also possible to discuss matters with the characters and even argue with their conclusions.

The object of the game is to solve a number of murders and this involves visiting the scenes of the crimes, interrogating suspects and generally doing everything that Holmes himself would have done.

This is far from easy, so you'll need to familiarise yourself with the instruction booklet which is a mine of information on just about everything from the Inglish language to London Transport. There is also a sheet depicting fragments of train timetables which, as you will soon discover, is particularly useful.

At the start of the game a full screen of text describes your Baker Street lodgings in detail. Holmes (that's you) and Watson are sitting there one Monday morning when Watson reads a report of a murder in the *Daily Chronicle*. In fact two murders have been committed, both apparently with the same weapon but in separate incidents, and Inspector Lestrade is to go to the scene that morning.

Extracting this information out of Watson can be difficult and he delights in making sarcastic comments such as: "This is brilliant Holmes. I don't know how you do it." The first time I played, I got fed up with him and went off on my own. I returned later to see whether he had changed his mind but found a note saying he had gone to see his patients and wasn't available. Another time he stubbornly refused to join me at all and the screen filled with: Watson remarks, "Sorry, I cannot do that now."

When Watson did finally decide to follow me I was faced with having to use London Transport. In keeping with Holmes' lazy character, I travelled either by train or hansom cab. Sometimes the cabbie appeared to be deaf and kept asking me where I wanted to go, even when I told him. Then if I didn't pay the correct fare he would become exceedingly agitated. If I didn't pay at all he would hurl abuse but take no further action. At the other extreme you do get change when you pay too much.

I was also constantly missing trains; they seemed to arrive and depart without allowing me to get on. Eventually when I did manage to get on one, I realised I had no idea where I was going. It later transpired that I had been standing on the wrong platform. Still, I suppose I shouldn't really complain as the trains appear to be free.

As in *The Hobbit* events proceed in real-time. A real-time clock is displayed throughout the game and you can even instruct the computer to wait until a specific time. This has the effect of speeding time up but does not prevent the other characters going about their business.

```
You are at Browns
Front Gate. To the
south there is a
local police man.
Visible exits are
east. You can see
a local police
man.
Watson enters.
A local police man
says to you " I am
sorry sir but I
have my orders, no
one is to get by.
".
A local police man
  Mon 10:53am
> S.
> S.
> S.
> W.
+
```

As in real life, day turns to night — or is supposed to, though I have found myself riding along in a cab at midnight with the sun shining on my face.

While it's not too difficult to find your way to the scene of the crime it is possible to lose Inspector Lestrade just as you can lose Thorin in *The Hobbit*. More than once I ended up wandering aimlessly along winding paths or being shot by one of the suspects as I went on my way.

The Inglish language first made its appearance in *The Hobbit* and in *Sherlock*, the vocabulary is around 800 words, which enables some quite complex sentences to be used, as long as you observe a few simple rules.

As Sherlock features 'animtalk' you can tell the other characters what you would like them to do, although since they remain independent they won't necessarily co-operate. The 'say to' format is used, though you only have to type in 'say to' once at the start of a conversation as opposed to repeating the phrase each time as in *The Hobbit*. You can ask anyone about anything using the command, 'Tell me about . . .' For example: Say to Watson, "Tell me about the pistol."

Unlike *The Hobbit* there is no Help facility, so you have to depend entirely on your own initiative to solve the case. However, there is a Print command which sends the contents of the adventure window to the printer and this is useful as it enables you to record your progress and go over events at your leisure.

The screen presentation is excellent. The graphics appear in a small window to the right, while the text scrolls alongside. At the bottom of the screen is the communications window where you type in your instructions and this scrolls independently. *Sherlock's* graphics were created by Russell Comte of *Mugsy* fame but are less detailed. Nevertheless, they are quite adequate.

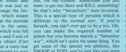
With a little more crashproofing Sherlock should appeal to the most discerning adventurer. If its success is anything like that of *The Hobbit* (and there is every reason to believe it will be) we can no doubt expect the inevitable flood of articles and help columns devoted to assisting budding Holmes.

Sophisticated, rich in atmosphere and amazingly detailed, *Sherlock* is a game which no Spectrum owner will want to be without. Not only do the characters react to your inputs but they also react to the behaviour of others, which means that the problems are slightly different each time you play the game.

If you're looking for something different from the usual fantasy or space adventures then why not try your hand at *Sherlock*. I suspect even Holmes himself would have difficulty solving this one. □

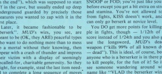


Berserking — all the rage

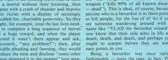


***Richard Bartle** considers some of the fads and fashions that sweep the land of Mud*

LIKE every other forms of society, the *MUD* wiz's have their own trends and fashions. In the early days it was just so *gauche* if you didn't "re-arrange the furniture" when you came in, which meant picking up a few objects that the mortals knew and expected to be in the same, trusted place as always, yet which you felt looked more artistic 40 rooms and 5 sets of goblins away. The favourite object d'art was the magic wand ("without a rusty star on the end"), which was supposed to start off in the cave, but usually ended up deep underground guarded by precisely those creatures you wanted to zap with it in the first place.



Later, it became fashionable to be "berserk". *MUD*'s wizs, you see, are meant to be (OK, they ARE) peaceful types who want to do nothing more than to mess up a mortal without their knowing, then appear with a crash of thunder and impress their victim with a display of seemingly uncalled-for, charitable generosity. So they might, for example, steal the last item needed to complete a long sequence of moves for a huge reward, and when the player learned it wasn't there appear and ask, innocently, "any problem?"; then, after suitable pleading and fawning, they would produce the item and disclose "some other player dropped it in the swamp" (not mentioning that the "other player" in question was none other than they themselves!).



However, after a while it becomes quite unbearable for wizs that they can't just kill players for fun, as if they do the "code of conduct" says they have to frig them back up to what they were before, and add some too, for the trouble. Sometimes you just want to get out there and KILL something! So that's why "berserkers" were invented. This is a special type of persona which is different to the normal sort. If you're berserk, you can't *ever* get to be a wiz. Oh, you can make the required number of points but you become merely a "berserker wiz", which isn't quite the same thing. You get none of the special wiz abilities, like SNOOP or FOD; you're just like you were before except you get a bit extra on strength and stamina. You're not allowed to flee from fights, KISS doesn't work, and you can only go berserk at novice level.

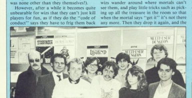
You DO get more points for killing people in fights, though — 1/12th of their score instead of 1/24th and you also get to use the longsword, *MUD*'s deadliest weapon ("kills 99% of all known dwarfs — dead"). This is ideal, of course, because anyone who is a berserker is in there purely to kill people, for the fun of it! So if you see someone wandering around with a name like "VLAD the berserker wizard", you know that their sole aims in life are death, death, and death, and perhaps you ought to scarper before they see some easy points in you...

Being a berserker was once rather fashionable — quite the rage, in fact. The latest trend, though, is invisibility. Here, wizs wander around where mortals can't see them, and play little tricks such as picking up all the treasure in the room so that when the mortal says "get it" it's not there any more. Then they drop it again, and the mortal doesn't know where it came from. Locking doors that the mortal has just opened but hasn't yet walked through, killing "easy" mobiles like the rats before the mortal can scoop up the points, and eavesdropping on conversations before interjecting from nowhere with some anonymous, sarcastic put-down, are where it's at at the moment.

There have been other fads, too, but the important thing is that they come about soon after wiz's learn of a new command I just put in. Picking up objects up and moving them around happened when I first permitted wizs to do that — before they were as restricted as anyone else in what they could pick up. Nowadays, *MUD* rearranges the location of useful objects itself, so there are maybe five or six places where the wand could start off. This gives everyone a sporting chance to get to it first when a virgin game is opened up for play (and to wait there until someone else comes along looking for it, so you can zap 'em into oblivion!)

The BERSERK feature lay dormant for ages, due to the positioning of the longsword on a rock between the two beaches, which made it nigh-on impossible to rescue except by making a perilous boat journey. Moving it to a more accessible position prompted everyone to try with a berserker persona of their own, even if all they wanted to do was to get the longsword out and give it to an ordinary, non-bersek player who couldn't pull it from its berserker-only fastening.

Invisibility earned its spurs when I stayed up until 4.30 myself one night to snoop on what people were doing (only one night, though — it takes me about two weeks to recover! Gawd knows how anyone can manage it *every* night, but they do!). I was there from midnight onwards invisibly, seeing if anyone spotted me as I weaved around causing subtle havoc to all and sundry. I even got to witness a conflict between two of our wizs, when PAULA the witch (who carries the dragon around). ▶



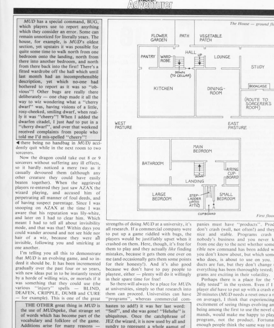
MUD wizs gather at Century's stand at the PCW show. l to r — Plonker, Century, Foxy, Lacrima, Richard, Madmax, Paula, Azax, Savik.

JUST to keep *Micro Adventurer*'s readership all buying millions of copies every month, here's a freebie *MUD* hint for you: if you want to get shot of the egg, either give it to someone else, quit or drop it in the fiery pit. Where's the fiery pit? Try killing the wolf sometime.



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MUD has a special command, BUG, which players use to report anything which they consider an error. Some can remain unnoticed for literally years. The house, for example, is *MUD*'s oldest section, yet upstairs it was possible for quite some time to walk north from one bedroom onto the landing, north from there into another bedroom, and north from there back into the first! There's a fitted wardrobe off the hall which until last month had an incomprehensible description, yet which no-one had bothered to report as it was so "obvious"! Other bugs are really there deliberately — one chap made it all the way to wiz wondering what a "cherry dwarf" was, having visions of a little, rosy-cheeked, smiling dwarf, when really it was "cheery"! When I added the dwarfen citadel, I just *had* to put in a "cherry dwarf", and over that weekend received complaints from people who told me I'd mis-spelled "cheery"!

◀ there being no handbag in *MUD)* accidently quit while in the next room to two sorcerers.

Now the dragon could take out 8 or 9 sorcerers without suffering any ill effects, so it hardly noticed a mere two as it casually devoured them (although any other creature they could have easily beaten together). When the aggrieved players re-entered they just saw AZAX the wizard playing, and accused him of perpetrating all manner of foul deeds, and of having suspect parentage. Since I was snooping on AZAX at the time I was aware that his reputation was lily-white, and later on I had to clear him. Which meant I had to tell all about invisibility mode, and that was that! Within days you could wander around and not see hide nor hair of a wiz, because they were all invisible, following you and smirking at one another.

I'm telling you all this to demonstrate that *MUD* is an evolving game, and so indeed it should be. It has been incremented gradually over the past four or so years, with new ideas put in to be instantly tested by a horde of willing wizs, or mortals if it was something that they could use (the various "injury" spells — BLIND, DEAFEN, CRIPPLE, DUMB and CURE — for example). This is one of the great strengths of doing *MUD* at a university, it's all research. If a commercial company were to put up a game riddled with bugs, the players would be justifiably upset when it crashed on them. Here, though, it's free for them to play and they actually *like* finding mistakes, because it gets them one over on me (and occasionally gets them some points for their honesty!). And it's also good because we don't have to pay people to playtest, either — plenty will do it willingly in their spare time for free!

So there will always be a place for *MUD*s at universities, simply so that research into them can proceed. Universities can have "programs", whereas commercial companies must have "products". Products don't crash (well, not often!) and they are nice and stable. Programs crash like nobody's business and you never know from one day to the next whether some terrible new command has been added which you don't know about, but which someone who does, is about to use on you. Products are fun, but they don't change until everything has been thoroughly tested; programs are exciting in their volatility.

Perhaps there is a place for the "not fully tested" in the system. Even if I as a player *did* have to put up with a crash every 20 minutes (*MUD* needs a reset once a night on average), I think that experiencing the excitement of seeing things evolving and of being among the first to use the novel commands, would make me happy to play the program, not the product. Fortunately, enough people think the same way to make debugging that much easier, and to encourage new additions to make the game even more fun for generations of adventurers to come.□

THE OTHER great thing in *MUD* is the use of *MUD*speke, that strange set of words which has become part of the vocabulary and folklore of the game. Additions arise for many reasons — because people are typing at great speed, because there are things which only exist in *MUD* and need a name, and because you can spot newcomers by their not using them (although they will usually be able to understand them). Two of the more popular "condensed feelings" words are SNIF and HEHEHE. SNIF is the invention of SUE the witch, who used it whenever she was upset, and it sort of caught on. When she finally left the game (for reasons unconnected with it, I hasten to add!) it was her last word: "Snif", and she was gone! "Hehehe" is ubiquitous. Once the catchphrase of JEZ the wizard, it is now used by all and sundry to represent a whole gamut of statements ranging from "that was funny" through "nudge, nudge, wink, wink, say no more squire" to "I know something you don't know!". I think I must be about the only person who doesn't use it, and my own particular *MUD*speke phrase, "augh" (to mean "oh no, not again!", "why me?" and other similar cries of despair) hasn't caught on at all, despite using it at the slightest provocation.

Augh!

For those readers with a Commodore 64 and modem, *MUD* is now running on Compunet.

Readers without access to Compunet can get details of how to access *MUD* from Richard Bartle, Department of Computer Science, Essex University, Colchester, Essex CO4 3SQ. Remember to enclose an SAE.

The Crane gang

*Struggle for supremacy amongst the Tribes of Crane, or boldly go where only a few have gone before in Starmaster — **Martin Croft** reports*

ON THE THIRD DAY before the Summer festival, an enormous force of Warhawk mounted troops, led by the Kinglord Nathaniel of Parker, swept over the walls of Lang and fell upon the city-leader's palace. The assault was aided by the treachery of Wandering Shaman Welvor, who attacked the palace from within the city walls.

Kinglord Vendu and Sea Shaman Velkan, leading the defenders, were cut down with their entire bodyguards. As night fell, the new masters of Lang met in the smouldering ruins of the palace to celebrate their victory, and divide the spoils.

All in all, just another day on the world called Crane . . .

The victorious Nathaniel and Welvor, and the unfortunate Vendu and Velkan, are, or were, all player characters in *Tribes of Crane*, a Play by Mail game run by Balham based Mitre Games.

Crane was written and originally run by the American PBM company Schubel and Son, and Mitre Games, which was started by Mark Blundell and Mark Jerome while they were at Oxford University in the late seventies, bought the European rights in 1980 for $6000.

Mitre launched *Crane* in August 1980, with 10 players. Blundell, now Mitre Games chairman, was UK *Crane's* games master for the first three years of its existence.

"We started in August 1980 with 10 players," he recalls. "We now have over 400, controlling 515 tribes and 120 political positions. *Crane* is the longest running single game in the UK." To start with, each player controls a small tribe, which can be any one of four types; War, Sea, Merchant, and Wandering. Each has its strengths and weaknesses. War tribes fight well, sea tribes are very mobile, Merchants trade at an advantage, and Wandering tribes — well, they breed more easily.

A number of players control more than one character on Crane — one German player (20 per cent of Mitre's turnover is export, mostly to Germany, Switzerland, and Sweden) spends between £20 and £25 per turn.

Established players can apply to one of the empires of Crane for the privilege of being allowed to rule a city, as well as their original tribe or tribes. If they are accepted, then they will control an additional character, who will be a city-leader.

Crane is not a fixed length game, and has no set victory conditions. Effectively, success is directly equated to survival, as in a Role Playing Game. As a result, there is a constant trade between players in items which may help in the survival stakes. One of the most valuable commodities in the game is information.

The polar regions are a case in point. While the rest of the map is regulated by a square grid, each of the ice caps is one region, which borders on to each of the 96 squares to the north or south. A tribe which knew how to move across the ice without getting lost would be able to use the poles as a short cut to any adjacent region. As yet, only one tribe knows this secret.

Most players begin the game by exploring the region they begin in. As turns go by, they meet other players, and can begin to trade with them — or fight them, if they wish. Blundell calls it "*Diplomacy* with 500 players."

In the game, there are two major power blocks — the Dark Union, and the Grand Union. Each controls one of the two major continents of Crane, and is a loose alliance of tribes and cities. When the game was launched, both empires were controlled by the games masters through non player characters, but they are now run by players.

The four years of playing time represent 20 years of game time, and all the recent history has happened as a result of player action. As Blundell puts it, "during those 20 years, great alliances have risen and fallen."

One player built up an alliance called the Legion from nothing to a point where 10 per cent of the planet's tribes belonged to it. He was betrayed by his own lieutenants, who made a surprise attack on his encampment and slaughtered his tribe.

The player's wife, who was also involved in the game, rang up one of the traitors at 8.00 next morning, and subjected him to a stream of abuse for betraying her husband.

Another alliance, and a rather more lasting one, consists of about 25 of the German players, who have banded together and built their own city.

Whenever players come into contact with a new city, they receive an information sheet; the sheet dealing with the Germans' city includes the observation that "the inhabitants of this city are renowned for their lack of a sense of humour."

Players are encouraged to exercise their imaginations, and are allowed to develop new ideas, inventions, and tactics, within certain limits. Any attempt to use present day technology is out: no gunpowder, no napalm. Magic is also not allowed.

One player built a 100 yard-long seige catapult; it was only after he had finished it that he was informed that it would collapse if he tried to move it.

On the other hand, intelligent ideas that fit into the *Crane* world view will work. Since giant hawks can be trained to carry warriors, players soon came up with the idea of stretching taut ropes from rooftops, and building catapults that could fire upwards, to combat assaults — such as the one on Lang.

Another player has been engaged on a long search for the Great Aquatic Albatross, which is rumoured to be the maritime equivalent of the War Hawk. Rumoured is the operative word: no such creature exists.

George Campbell, *Crane's* senior games master, is blasé however. "Crane is not a very amusing world — it's too hard for that. The only things that amuse me these days are the city assaults. I suppose I just like senseless carnage," he admits.

On a more serious note, he suggests that it is impossible to isolate single incidents in Crane's history as representing the game. "It's the whole collection of little incidents which make up a true picture of the world," he says.

Crane is not Mitre Games' only offering. The company also runs *Star Master*, which, as the name suggests, is a science fiction game. As with *Crane*, it is run under license from Schubel and Son.



In *Star Master*, players design the races they wish to control. Starting with an allowance of 300 points, various attributes can be picked from a very comprehensive "shopping list". The options available range from the simple — fur or feathers — to the complex — subepidermal photosynthesis cells, or the ability to detect ultra violet radiation.

To allow players to have robotic beings, there is even an option to have wheels; but the only person to have designed a race using this, is a Swiss player who runs a breed of lizards with a large wheel in the centre of their chests. Apparently, they propel themselves with their two rear legs — much like a wheelbarrow.

There are also a scattering of races taken from science fiction books and films — a couple of Romulans, some Terran humans, and at least one Dorsai among them.

In addition to designing a race, players have to define what type of planet they are from. The important choice is the temperature class. Each planet is divided into five bands according to temperature; the middle band is the equator and therefore the hottest. The two bands adjacent to the equator are one class cooler, and the outer two bands, the polar regions, are one class cooler again.

The temperature classes of a race's home planet have a direct bearing on that race's ability to colonise other worlds. A race accustomed to temperature classes eight, nine, and ten (– 30 to 180 Fahrenheit) would have problems on a world where iron melted at the ice-caps, and the equatorial oceans were made of molten platinum!

New players tend to spend some time exploring their home systems and establishing colonies to exploit natural resources.

Once they feel confident with the game system, however, they usually move out and start looking for trouble — which is seldom far away.

Once they have moved out from their home system, players will soon meet other races. Some of these will be player controlled, while others will be run by the games master.

New players will not have a high enough technological level to harm established ones, or the games master controlled neutral races. One of the first priorities, then, is to improve their technological base. Players can achieve this in a number of ways, of which trade, research, capturing enemy ships, finding ancient alien artifacts are but a few.

Most players will find themselves forced to learn to co-exist, if not to co-operate, with their neighbours and a healthy network of trade will soon evolve.

George Campbell (l) and Mark Blundell — Mark is Craning his neck to keep an eye on Thailand

At present there are 120 active players in *Star Master*. It was running for three months last year, and had attracted rather more people, but the games master left Mitre suddenly, and the game had to be abandoned.

When it restarted in January, all the existing players were offered free moves as compensation for the money wasted when the first game collapsed, and around two-thirds accepted.

Mitre now have two games masters working on *Star Master* full-time, and believe that there will be no recurrence of problems.

Both *Star Master* and *Tribes of Crane* are human moderated, although Mitre uses a Commodore Pet to word process replies.

In the new year, however, they will be starting another of Schubel and Son's games, *Global Supremacy*, which is wholly computer moderated (apart from certain special actions which need the attention of a human).

Global Supremacy is set on earth following some kind of holocaust. Technology has been reduced to the level of the 1930s.

Players choose one of the nations of present-day Earth, and struggle against each other for supremacy, using all the powers at their disposal — military, economic, and political.

Blundell says that "Mitre is working with Schubel and Son on the acquisition of a suitable computer system," and predicts that the game should be up and running in January.

At the moment, Blundell and George Campbell are both playing in one of the American run games of *Global Supremacy*.

"Mark is India, and I'm Thailand, in Game 10," says George. "We're both very worried about Taiwan — they have just conquered mainland China."

"They both used nuclear weapons," Blundell adds. "I had to divert money from developing my industrial base to build my own nuclear capacity."

According to George, Portugal is also causing some sleepless nights. "He's rounded up most of Europe into concentration camps."

Mitre Games has also taken an option on another PBM game, this time not one of Schubel and Sons. Called *Midgard*, Blundell described it as "*Tribes of Crane* with magic. The lack of magic in *Crane* is its biggest selling point — but it's also the reason why a lot of people don't play it."

Blundell is also working with Schubel and Son on the design of a "power game" set in a Third World state, which will be played by modems. it will be games master moderated, but only to the extent that the GM will choose from a list of alternative results generated by the computer.

Mitre is also committed to an aggressive marketing policy. The latest idea is boxed sets of *Crane* and *Star Master*, which contain the rules, information sheets, and two free turns for £9.95 each. The boxes have been designed by an advertising agency, and the artwork is by a professional book illustrator. Mitre has signed a distribution deal with Games Workshop, by which these boxed sets are being distributed throughout the UK and in the US.

Schubel and Son has even bought some — Mitre is shipping 2000 for each game to America, with the contact addresses in the rule books changed to Schubel's.

As Blundell wryly observed, "It's nice to see some of the money moving the other way across the Atlantic for a change."

Mitre Games address is 189 Balham High Road, London SW12



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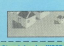
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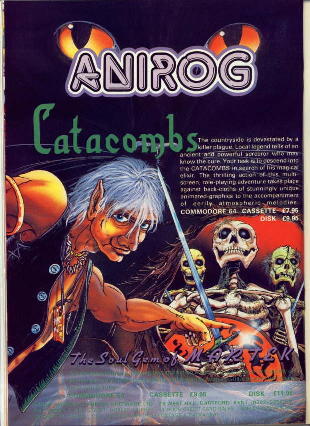
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Peter Pan adventure

***Gren Hatton** joins Peter Pan and the Lost Boys — and Wendy and Tinkerbell — in Never Never Land*

WITH CHRISTMAS round the corner, what better stocking-filler than that good old nursery faithful *Peter Pan*, now given a new look by software house Soft Option, who have conceived and executed a mixed text and graphic adventure following very faithfully the story-line and settings (and even the mood) of JM Barrie's classic childrens' fantasy.

Publishers Hodder and Stoughton have put their name to this new product, and the product is well marketed, with imaginative and appropriate illustrations on the case, and when you eventually switch on and boot up, some well-drawn 'location shots' as the adventure unfolds.

The brand new 1984 Puffin paperback edition of the book is included in the package. Funnily enough, Hodder had to buy these off Puffin, to whom they had sold the paperback rights!

The game itself is a stimulating mixture of text and graphics, as we have come to expect from every good game since *The Hobbit*. Unlike such games as *Valhalla*, the graphics are scrolled off the screen by any subsequent text; and the generation of graphics, being necessarily dependent on PLOT/DRAW commands in machine code in order to squeeze in the maximum number of location pictures, is rather slow.

The slow pictures are an inevitable consequence of putting lots of pictures into the 64K address space of an 8-bit machine — and the program realises this limitation by drawing them only on the first visit to a new location, and thereafter assuming that you remember what the picture looks like. The gradual disappearance of the graphics in this game could perhaps have been dealt with slightly more elegantly using standard tricks such as a scrolling window for text, or even a simple CLS command at the right point.

As for the story-line, it sticks closely to the book; and there are a number of tricks and traps which depend on a good knowledge of the plot together with patience and a sound memory to thread your way through a maze or two so as to pick up 'essential' objects. As you might expect, some of the objects have to be won in some way (try getting the dagger without killing Tinker Bell, for instance! — it can be done once you discover the right way), and you can expect to die several times before solving each of the more devious problems. Adults will probably find that there are not enough problems, and that many of the essential objects are in fact far too easy to acquire, but this seems an attempt on the part of the author to fit the level of the game to the most likely age-group of the players, say eight to 14 or so.

In essence, like most games of this type, success usually boils down to discovering the precise words to use to talk productively to the computer. This game has one or two new words in the vocabulary — and you don't get to the Never Land in the first place unless you can string together the correct sentence of reasonable grammatical complexity, with a subordinate clause and proper (though terse) grammatical construction. However, there are only one or two grammatical high-spots of this nature, and many of the dialogues with the computer are a bit frustrating, as you try to decide which (out of the fifty or so vocabulary words which we discovered) is the correct two- or three-word combination to solve a particular problem.

Another element of this game is the way in which the Lost Boys, Wendy, the Pirates, wild beasts and Indians wander about in a random fashion. They also occasionally interact with each other (pirates and Indians generally fight if they happen to meet). It's a good feature, and any adventure benefits a lot from the equivalent of *D&D*'s Wandering Monsters. However, like the peripatetic heroes and gods in *Valhalla*, Peter Pan's cronies are a restless and illogical crew. You may have spent ages looking for Wendy, when she suddenly trundles up in an unexpected spot; then, before you can react (and although it is obvious that you need to be together) she wanders off again without even realising that you are there. Nonetheless, some of it is well done, and you should find that, for instance, the Indians no longer attack you after you have rescued Tiger Lily.

The game is, to some extent, acted out in real time. For example, if Tinker Bell is taken ill and you take no positive action for about two minutes, she will die. However, for most of the game this feature is dormant, and you can lurk in the forest or swim in the river for days on end without ever getting hungry, thirsty, tired or eaten by monsters, so it could have been handled more consistently.

There is a SAVE-game feature, and this is a much less tedious way of re-entering the game after being killed off than by starting again from scratch. However, we found that with a little practice you can start from scratch and reach the Never Land in well under three minutes, and thereafter you can overcome already-familiar obstacles at the rate of about one or two minutes each. One notable lack is that you have no measure of how well you have done apart from intuitive 'feel' — it should not have been too difficult to add encouragement after each failure by saying "Well done, you completed 28% of the adventure" or some such formula.

I have to some extent been damning *Peter Pan* with faint praise, and that is not fair, for the product is well thought out and sensitively written in a way which I am sure would have appealed to the book's author. It has a distinct fairy-tale atmosphere which should fit nicely into the games-chest of many Spectrum owners, and it is ideally timed for the Christmas holidays. Even the text is a cut above many adventures, with only one or two minor punctuation errors which we could detect.

ROYALTIES on *Peter Pan — the Adventure Game* go to the Hospital for Sick Children, in Great Ormond Street. The game costs £9.95.

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Five Ways Software

***Martin Croft** visits the company which programmed the Lone Wolf Series for Hutchinson, and King Arthur's Quest and Aztec for Hill MacGibbon*

AT ONE END of Birmingham's Bournville Lane, as the name suggests, is the Cadbury's chocolate factory. At the other end is a factory of a rather different sort — Five Ways Software.

Five Ways employs 50 people, 20 of them programmers. It has its own legal department and the company's offices take up the whole of the second floor of the imposingly named Imperial House.

Five Ways Software developed out of the government's Micro Electronics in Education Programme. Five Ways school, a Birmingham based voluntary aided grammar school, was chosen as one of the three national software centres, specialising in material for secondary education.

One of the fundamental governing precepts of the MEP was that the projects it sponsored would become financially independent as soon as possible. As a result, Tony Clements, who was teaching Maths and Statistics at the school, became managing director of the fledgling Five Ways company in January of 1983, two years after the MEP backed project started.

Tony Clements, Five Ways managing Director

Since then Five Ways has produced an impressive range of educational software. Clients include Heinemann, Hutchinson, Macmillan and the Natural History Museum in the UK, as well as companies in the EEC and America.

The *Lone Wolf* programs — written by Five Ways and published by Hutchinson for the Spectrum — were the first straight games projects that the company worked on. Even *King Arthur's Quest* and *Hunt for the Sun*, published by Hill MacGibbon, are seen as educational, although written in an adventure format.

The treatment *Lone Wolf* received, however, was no different to that accorded to any other project. There was a client liaison officer who dealt with all contact with the client. Working on the program itself was a team consisting of a project leader, two designers, two graphic artists, and four actual programmers.

The creative input comes largely from the designers, although suggestions from other team members are welcome.

With *Lone Wolf*, Hutchinson wanted a text only adventure following the format and plot of the books as closely as possible. Five Ways, however, already had on hand a real time combat system, according to Andy Halliday, one of the company's two designers.

"We'd been working on it for some time, and when *Lone Wolf* arrived, it just fitted perfectly," he says.

Answering criticisms that the programs are just too close to the plots of the books, he admits that "it would have been nice to go off on a flight of fantasy — but it was a real challenge to get as much of the book as we could in the program.

"We managed to get about 60 per cent of the text in, but we did have to add some extra combat sequences to cover up the gaps."

Both games were produced in close collaboration with the authors of the *Lone Wolf* books, Gary Chalk and Joe Dever.

Roger Christiansen, Five Ways other designer, also worked on the *Lone Wolf* series in the initial stages; he claims that the project took over a year of man hours to complete.

"The elapsed time was between four and five months — but we had four programmers working on it simultaneously, the same as on *Arthur's Quest* and *Hunt for the Sun*," he recalls.

Roger, who is one of the five or six members of the company who actually attended Five Ways school, was the designer responsible for *Arthur's Quest* and *Hunt for the Sun*.

"Our first step is to design a story board covering the plotlines," he explained.

"*Aztec* was story boarded in about a week, but *King Arthur* took longer — it went through a number of changes over a few months. We had to have several brainstorming sessions on that one."

Aztec and *King Arthur* were both designed as introductory adventures that would teach children spatial awareness and coordination, as well as force them to use inductive reasoning. Hill MacGibbon has published both, along with three other of Five Ways educationally oriented programs, *Special Agent, Ballooning* and *Car Journey*.

Roger Christiansen Publications Editor

Most of Five Ways' programming is done on a 380Z or on an Apple. The company has just taken delivery of the new Apple 2c, and is evaluating it. Tony Clements believes that "by the middle of next year we'll move on to a 16 bit machine."

Andy Halliday, Divisional Manager, Software

Clements sees the future for Five Ways very much in terms of business plans and marketing strategies. The company already has one full time market analyst, and another will be starting work soon.

"There is a shakeout happening now, especially at the retail end," he believes. "Come next year, the big retail companies will deal only with a small number of software houses, instead of the hundreds they have to talk to now."

He is looking very carefully at the potential of the American market. "It has to be bigger — there's more purchasing power, and much better marketing."

One thing that must not be forgotten when dealing with a company like Five Ways is that it is primarily a producer of educational software.

Furthermore, it does not publish any of its own material. Packages are comissioned by external publishing companies or educational bodies. As a result the designers and programmers have little chance to let their imaginations run wild, and have to work largely to somebody else's dictates — but that may be changing.

According to Andy Halliday, "we're working on some more adult adventures at the moment, but whether we will be marketing them ourselves depends on our feelings about the market."

He refused to be drawn further, except to say that the first had a plot that featured secret agents, mysterious haunted mansions, and various other stalwart clichés of the adventure world, and will be text and graphics.

It will be interesting to see what Five Ways can make of a project on which they are allowed to unleash their full creative powers. □

Fire on the Keyboard

***Noel Williams** tackles Hutchinson's new computer games, Flight From the Dark and Fire on the Water, based on the Lone Wolf game book series*

IT'S GETTING HARDER to make the distinction between computer gamer, wargamer, roleplayer, adventurer and reader of fantasy novels. Joe Dever and Gary Chalk have produced something to make the distinction even less clear — the *Lone Wolf* programmed adventure books, which have now been turned into computer adventures.

It's easy to see why the computer games have been written. A programmed scenario in book form is only a couple of removes from a computer adventure, as the description 'programmed' tells us. Any competent programmer can turn such a book into a simple game with ease. In fact this is probably the easiest way to write an adventure.

Using a computer to play such a paragraph game has various advantages over the book version. No pages to turn, no risk of losing your place or forgetting the next paragraph number, no need to throw dice or to keep records on scraps of paper. But if you are looking for an interesting computer game you want more than this, especially if the game is based on a book with the same structure and which is a third of the price. Most people would have a shopping list of additions which would include things like 'attractive graphics', 'animation', 'real time action', 'significant differences from the book in plot', 'use of sound'.

Five Ways Software, the company which programmed the games, clearly know this and has gone some way towards ticking off all the items on your shopping list. You get real time combat, illustrations of each setting, moving characters and use of sound. However there does not seem to be much in the way of variation from the original books — in fact you can proceed through the programs in many situations by using the book as a reference guide. What variations there are are generally by way of reducing descriptions and missing events out. Occasionally this becomes a real problem. For example in the first four 'paragraphs' of *Fire on the Water* so much has been taken out of the original that you are given no choices at all and have to play through three combats. Unless you start with a well trained character you stand little chance of surviving this onslaught.

Real time combat on the Spectrum replaces the combat system of the books. The conflict in the computer versions is the most detailed and novel aspect of the program. You have choice of weapons and choice of tactics, including the psychic modes and mind blast and mind shield, and have to move your character to the most advantageous position on screen for striking a particular kind of blow. Movement is only in one plane (left to right) and you cannot change weapons halfway through a fight, but simply remembering which keys govern which tactic makes the contest quite hard. Different weapons add different values to combats and the most effective tactic also depends on the chosen weapon (it's quite hard to stab someone with a mace!). However the Spectrum's keyboard means that timing of blows is haphazard — you never know if a particular keystroke has led to a particular blow and I found that sometimes my blows were 'queued' so that the figure went on striking even when my fingers were not on the keyboard.

Nor is the feedback of effects during combat all that it might be. You do not get the usual constantly updated stats on performance. Instead your own endurance and combat skill are represented by two green thermometer like columns. When the liquid in endurance has run out, you are dead. As for the monsters, they sometimes indicate weakness by adopting slightly crumpled postures, but in other cases you have no real idea if you are doing the right thing or not.

The combination of these devices means that combat feels more haphazard than it probably is. In practice you tend to bash away at the keys in no particular order (because you have no indication of which does best) until your endurance gets low, when you attempt to retreat (and, if you are like me, you hit the wrong key only to find that you have killed the monster by mistake). It seems a little silly to design a complete system which the player is totally ignorant of.

Another novelty is that, instead of being given a character to start with who has pregenerated skills, you must undergo a training session to establish your basic skill. This takes the form of a fight with one of the elders. Apart from the report at the end of the fight you do not get a good indication of how well you are doing and the whole business is a little mystifying the first time round, but it is quite a good idea and works well once you know what is supposed to be happening.

The graphics themselves are somewhere between *The Hobbit* and *Valhalla*. They certainly offer no major advances on previous games. The backgrounds are rather better than those in *The Hobbit* with a better use of colour and some shading. Some are more imaginative but others less well drawn than *Valhalla*. The moving figures are less convincing than *Valhalla's* despite being better drawn and on a larger scale. The silliest thing is the way that your own character hops around the place on a single leg. The other leg is supposedly hidden by a cloak but the visual effect resembles an amputated Kermit imitating Little Red Riding Hood. On the other hand some of the monsters are quite well done, and the combat sequences produce some credible combinations of hacking and slashing. However our copy was a pre-production model and we are told some of the weaker graphics may change by the final version.



You play through the non-combat stages in the game using five keys. Each time you move to a new paragraph (usually a new location) the screen wipes and you have to wait for a few boring minutes whilst your character and any others wander onto the screen. A description then scrolls up on the lower part of the screen. To repeat the description press key 2. This may be necessary as some descriptions are too long for the screen and you may forget to press <Space> to pause the scrolling. As usual with paragraph games the descriptions have the irritating habit of telling you what you want, what you decide and what you are going to do now.

However in most situations there are several choices of action. Pressing key 1 cycles through each of these in turn. When you arrive at the one you want you press 9 and that calls up the appropriate response, which in most cases will be a new location and a new description. This is quite a good system, easy to use. My three year old son could manage it and play the game in a limited way though, of course, the rest of the game is too difficult for such a young child. Drawbacks with the system are that even in cases where you only have one choice you still have to use the system to advance to the next screen and, if you 'Take the sword' you automatically drop the axe, so you are immediately given the option to 'Take the axe'.

The final control key gives you an inventory of objects carried. This is sometimes important because once I found I was carrying various gold pieces, presumably taken from a recently deceased sailor, though no message told me that I had them so it appears you can acquire objects without your knowledge.

As you might expect from other single key systems there is little to do by way of control in this game. In addition because the computer version is a cut down version of the book you have fewer choices in particular situations. This is not to say that the games are short. They aren't. But they will mainly be attractive if you like real time action, description and plenty of half-screen graphics. If you are looking for extensive tactical decisions, complex puzzles to solve or intelligent characters (à la *Valhalla* and *Hobbit*), you will be disappointed.

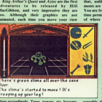
I am not sure if these games are likely to be successful or not. Certainly the screen presentation is attactive and the system is simple enough to be easily understood yet complex enough to interest many youngsters. But they are not better than any of the popular adventures and can be seen as a retrogressive step because they stick so closely to the rigid paragraph structure. No-one who likes detailed puzzle adventures will look twice at them. But as Christmas stocking fillers for eleven year olds, which is where the market for programmed fantasy books seems to be, they will probably be ideal. They are creditable, professional and attractive, if limited, games.

Adventurous Arthur and the Aztecs

John Fraser reviews King Arthur's Quest and Aztec

FEW ADVENTURERS can have failed to notice the new breed of graphic adventures which has been emerging recently. Now, in the wake of such epics as *Lords of Midnight*, come two more games which allow the player to roam through a three dimensional world.

***King Arthur's Quest* and *Aztec* are the first adventures to be released by Hill MacGibbon, and very impressive they are too. Although their graphics are not animated, each time you move your view**

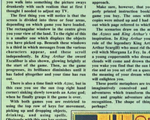


alters accordingly. Trees, towers, etc, become larger as you approach them. Amazingly, if you walk into something the picture sways drunkenly with such realism that at first I thought I needed to adjust my TV.

The first thing you will notice is that the screen is divided into three or four areas, depending on which game you have loaded. The rectangular window in the centre gives you your view of the land. To the right of this is a smaller one which displays the objects you have picked up. Beneath these windows is a third in which messages from the various characters appear, and these scroll independently. In *King Arthur* the sword Excalibur is also shown, glowing brightly at the start of the game. Then, as the game progresses, its brilliance diminishes until it has faded altogether and your time has run out.

There is also a time limit with *Aztec*, but in this case you see the sun (top right hand corner) sinking slowly towards an Aztec god; when he finally grasps it the game is over.

With both games you are restricted to using the top row of keys for movement, picking up and dropping objects, drinking, and using spells. Obviously with this one key system for inputting instructions it's impossible to have any sort of dialogue with the characters or to perform more than a narrow range of actions.



To some extent the 'use' key compensates for this deficiency. If you wish to, say, unlock a door, you press '7' on the keyboard followed by space until the object's name appears in the communications window. Then, when you press enter, the door will be opened. It's as simple as that.

Casting spells is just a little more difficult, as you have to decode clues which you will find on your journey. This entails consulting the 'spell breaker' on a colourful poster which is provided with the game.

One of the attractions of these games is that, unlike many adventures, your movements are not confined to a particular route. You are free to explore as much of the land as time permits, although unless you keep track of where you are you may find yourself retracing your steps frequently.

The ground over which you travel is divided into ten by ten squares; you can see this cross-hatching before you as you move. Each game has eight such areas and they take a while to explore thoroughly. When you take into account the time taken to cast spells and so on, you will have to set aside several hours for play.

Although the landscape is sometimes flat and monotonous, the objects and creatures you encounter are drawn in high resolution graphics and the medieval lettering is superbly done. What defects there are seem trivial when you consider the novelty of approach.

Make sure, however, that you get a properly printed instruction booklet with the game you buy. The ones with my review copies were mixed up and I had a job sorting out which page referred to which game.

The scenarios draw on the mythology of the *Aztecs* and *King Arthur's* Camelot for inspiration. In *King Arthur* you assume the role of the legendary King Arthur (no not Arthur Scargill) who must rid the land of the evil witch Morgana Le Fey. In *Aztec* you are a young coppersmith who dreams that rainclouds will come and drown the sun. When you wake you find that the sun had failed to rise and so you set off on a quest to discover the meaning of your dream which you hope will enlighten you.

These poetic metaphors are translated into imaginatively conceived and constructed adventures which transform the traditional text and graphic adventure almost beyond recognition. The shape of things to come, perhaps?




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Quantum leap adventures

Andrew Pennell *looks at two adventures for the QL from Talent Computer Systems — Zkul and West*

ZKUL IS the first adventure to appear on the QL that isn't either a conversion from other machines or written in BASIC. It's a large (85K), complex adventure, that is very challenging and thoroughly absorbing.

The strange name of the adventure comes from a Skull-like rock formation that marks an entrance and exit from an underground system of tunnels. According to the blurb there are 'many hundred' locations, and I can well believe it, as the system of caves goes on indefinitely as far as I can see, and takes an awful lot of exploring.

Many years ago the occupiers of the mountain, dwarfs, were under vicious attack by the men of the Caras, and they fought until most were dead. Now, the caves are rumoured to be full of great treasures, and it is your task to enter the system, collect the treasures, then bring them to your friend Eldomir's hut in the woods.

As well as yourself, there are two other intelligent, independent treasure hunters wandering around, a swordsman and a thief but in my wanderings I have yet to meet either. I don't particularly relish the thought. There are other persons in the caves, with less intelligence, and some of those I have met. Some of the more harmless ones chant messages, which built up into useful clues, while others have a more deadly effect on you.

There are no graphics in this adventure, but that doesn't matter a bit, as the quality of the game is superb. The descriptions of the locations are very detailed, giving lots of atmosphere, and when you get stuck you will sometimes be offered a clue, in return for points deducted from your score. The hints section didn't work quite as it should on my version — normally, when asked if I wanted a hint I would reply with a single 'Y', but once when I wanted more information I grovelled a bit and said 'yes please', to which the reply was 'if you are not going to ask nicely then I won't tell you'!

There are very many objects scattered around (the number of which, naturally, greatly exceeds the maximum which you can hold), and even complete novices should be able to get quite a few. The games design means that, while novices can get quite a way into the game and enjoy it, it's still difficult enough for the seasoned player once you get further into it. Even with all the additional information Talent supplied me with, I have yet to come close to finishing it.

There is a little humour in the program, sparsely spread around, but it's just the right amount so that it doesn't detract from the 'seriousness' of the task in hand. For example, as my searching for a key to a door was fruitless, I tried the alternate method, namely 'throw axe at dooor'; the reply was 'leave the poor door alone'. When you get killed, which is thankfully not as often as in Talent's other QL game, *West*, you have the chance of re-incarnation, twice only. After this, if you die it says 'Even James Bond didn't live this many times' (geddit?)

The logical problems in *Zkul* range from the simple to the downright impossible, just as they should. Hints are available from wandering dwarves, but they are few and far between, and the 'help' command never once proved useful. Generally speaking it's logically laid out, making cartography easier, but there are some random mazes in the game that I would prefer Talent had left out. The forest is one such place, and when I actually got a hint (at the loss of more points) it did me no good whatsoever. There are also a couple of random networks inside the cave that are similarly frustrating. This aspect was the only part of *Zkul* that I didn't like.

What of the QL as an adventurer's computer? Well, its biggest advantage is of course its memory — with around 90K of user RAM in the standard model, it means that huge adventures can be written, even without resorting to the text-compression that Talent use. All that RAM also means that there is a great graphics potential, with none of the attribute problems of the Spectrum. The microdrives are not the world's best storage medium, but they are sufficient for loading the game, and saving your status on. If Commodore owners can play adventures using the slower 1541 disc drive, then QL owners can make do with the microdrive. The quality of the keyboard is not so good, but a redeeming feature is its type-ahead buffer, so you can enter the next command while it is printing out a long location.

It has two snags though — the BASIC is slow and not exactly bug free, so BASIC adventures are probably to be avoided, and the 68008 processor is totally different to any other micro, making conversion a longer and more difficult process. However, if it sells in quantity, which looks likely, then software will appear for it in increasing quantities, though the price of games will remain high until Sinclair reduce the price of blank cartridges to a more sensible level, or until a cassette interface appears. Of course, the greatest boost to QL adventures would be for *Quill* (the adventure program compiler, not the word processor) to be released for it. Philip Mitchell (of *Hobbit* and *Sherlock* fame) expressed his desire for a 68000-based machine with a lot of RAM long before the QL appeared, so lets hope Melbourne House lets him loose on one.

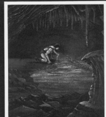
Zkul is an excellent adventure, and its size means that the further you get into it, the harder it gets, which is just as I like it. It is even more excellent when you consider that it's the first QL adventure, and this is the standard the others have to beat. ▶



Dr John Malone, Veronica Colin, and Professor Andrew Colin, founders of Talent Computing Systems

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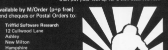
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Wild West heroes

UNLIKE *Zkul*, *West* is a QL version of a game Talent originally released for the Commodore 64. The change in processors does not seem to have been unduly difficult for Talent.

It's a text only game, consisting of around 48K of machine code and compressed data. Loading is simple; you simply press RESET, insert the cartridge into the left hand drive, and press F2, and about 20 seconds later the game is loaded. Apparently there will be a graphic loading screen on the final version, but my pre-release copy lacked such a screen.

Being pre-release I received no instructions at all, but it seemed pretty clear what to do — you are a cowboy, starting near a deserted town, and your aim is to find some form of treasure. I found about 25 locations but there are many more, though death occurred too regularly to allow exploration any further.

West is a real time adventure, which means that if you pause for too long in thought then the action will go on without you. Some of the time this just adds to the atmosphere, by printing 'a ball of tumbleweed rolls past', but usually the real-time events are more detrimental. A common one is 'there is a bad tempered bank robber here', which, unless you act very quickly, is soon followed by 'he shoots at you', and the bank robbers in *West* are regrettably rather good with a Colt.

Apart from the bank robbers, there are a few other entities dotted around the town, including a horse who is supposed to be a 'trusty steed'. In practice his trustworthiness is doubtful, as he has a habit of wandering off when it is least convenient, and I'm not sure of his use in the game. Its possible to mount him and examine the town from horseback, but there seems no advantage to such action. Indeed it is more dangerous, as the bank robber has a preference for shooting your horse rather than yourself, and if you're on him at the time then he crushes you as he falls. In this town re-incarnation is commonplace, with the horse, the bank robber and yourself all having 'infinite lives', and when any die they just leave a body around the place, which remains subsequently. After a long game, the locations can become quite crowded with corpses of various sorts.

I think I found the location of the treasure, but was unable to verify it until I found a key, which I have yet to do. In fact, I only ever discovered three different objects — a box of matches, a spade, and a gun. The gun is the only one I have found a use for, and it does not come with nearly enough bullets — with the town crawling with bank robbers and indians, six bullets don't go very far. There is a wide range of locations, though to confuse the map-makers some locations move about between re-incarnations. There is also a barren area that seems to go on infinitely in all directions, which is rather unfair.

There may not be many objects, but there are loads of different ways of dying. Apart from being shot, which is the most common, you have to avoid snakes, vultures (especially around the corpses), rampaging Indians, and Rock Mountain Spotted Fever. It has a Save & Load to Microdrive options, though only one filename is allowed at the moment.

West has a lot of atmosphere, with very descriptive locations, but its 'real time' element tends to make it too random for me — apart from shooting the robbers, there seems no way to avoid the other disasters that can put a quick end to an otherwise successful attempt at completing it. *West* is a nice adventure, except for the inevitably of regular death.□

The Final Mission

Tom Frost tackles the final part of the Ket Trilogy

Dateline: 19th September, 1984.
THE DAY has arrived. After successfully solving all of the problems in *Mountains of Ket* and *Temple of Vran* the pre-paid copy of the third part of the *Ket Trilogy* is due today. Where is that postman? Computer, TV and tape-recorder are at the ready. A day off from work has been arranged (or perhaps it's your grannie's funeral — again!) as preparations are made to win the video recorder and title of **Britain's Best Adventurer.** Check letter-box again. Nothing! Re-check calendar. Yes, today is the 19th. Click, rattle. Dash to front door. Small parcel on the floor. Rip open and off we go!

Insert cassette and press REWIND! Calm down. Press PLAY. Nice title screen. Read insert and competition entry details. CRASH! Blank screen! Rewind and LOAD again. Come on, POWER 48 is supposed to load quicker! BEEP! BEEP! At last . . .

Once again, faced with a variation of a LOCKED DOOR and no key! But HELP is at hand — the insert made mention of STAND ON CHAIR. Try that! OK, now can see solution to problem. NOT AGAIN! Another room with no apparent exit. Eventually the light shines and you're off again. Calm, confident now — proceed carefully (thinks — not many other adventurers will have found that DAGGER!). On-screen SCORE shows 11% — not bad and not had to re-start yet.

Suddenly another dead-end. TRAPDOOR which will not open. Retreat. Explore PILLARED HALL, find GARLIC, SOAP and a CROWBAR — hurry to TRAPDOOR — but was OOFED by a MAGIC BOOT on the way! Manage to open TRAPDOOR but break CROWBAR in the process. Will that matter? Press on for now.

What's this? *Another* locked DOOR! Retreat again. Eventually find key — rush back to DOOR but there is no KEYHOLE!

Retreat and explore again. Find DELPHIA'S BODY in the morgue, an AEROSOL and a green slime MONSTER. Caught by the MONSTER — DEAD — PUSH KEY FOR ANOTHER GAME.

OK, off we go again. OOFED again — must be a way of avoiding that (there is, read symbols and reverse the "en" monster!). Cleaned up the green slime this time and used AEROSOL to reduce the LOCKED DOOR problem only to be faced with ANOTHER locked DOOR. Key works this time. Fight MONK and into large CHAMBER. SCORE now 38/. Press on, explore CHAMBER, dodging arrows. Find five GATES, each with a GUARDIAN who poses a question. SCORE now 51%! Suddenly realise further progress only possible by answering questions correctly! DEAD STOP! After two and a half programmes of traditional adventure, Incentive have obviously decided enough is enough — after all £400 is at stake and it shouldn't be too easy. To illustrate this, the first GATE is blocked by the GUARDIAN OF WISDOM who asks you to complete the sequence "2, 2, 2, 3, 2, . . .". The first obvious thought of 22, 23, 24, 25 produces a "you are ignored" response to your entry of 425 so try again! Looks as though it could be a telephone number. Directory Enquiries — No, Incentive's number is not 22232. . .!! VAT number? Registered Company Number? No! No! Is it a phone number? The dialling code for Westminster is 222 — could it be the House of Commons? — perhaps not, if WISDOM is any kind of a clue!

You soon realise that the title of Britain's Best Adventurer will not be easily gained. After all, with a new video recorder you could be tempted away from your computer!□

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Wreck raising

Adventure *Titanic* **Micro** *Spectrum 48K* **Price** *£7.95* **Format** *Cassette* **Supplier** *R & R Software, 5 Russell Street, Gloucester GL1 1NE.*

TITANIC IS a Strategy-Adventure game with a novel, or is it naval, scenario. Once you have experimented with the strategy element, in finding a generous sponsor and selecting the best way to distribute your cash between the very essential repair kits and diving teams, the first phase of the adventure game begins. Unfortunately, this is where the random generator factor raises its ugly head in a game which is all too often over dependent upon the RND function.

On screen, courtesy of a NASA photo-survey of the North Atlantic, are 16 squares randomly placed in each game. Only one is the Titanic — the rest are, at best, spurious shoals of fish or, at worst, either icebergs, which consume an expensive repair kit, or a World War II wreck which detonates and destroys your (even more expensive) crew.

Once you have hit your twentieth wreck, the same boring message of its discovery gets somewhat stale. Effectively, in this stage of the game, all you have to do is plough across the screen with the cursor keys, trying to stumble over the one correct square, before you run out of supplies, divers or kits. If you do run out of any, its the end of the game — as simple as that.

Assuming you do strike lucky, as you will about one game in three, you will be rewarded with the chance of exploring the wreck of the Titanic for gold. The game now reduces to a logically mapped maze, consisting of nearly 500 locations across three decks. Twelve of the locations contain part maps of the ship. The idea of such a plot is inventive, a pleasant change from caves, deserts and misty mountains, but the game is terribly stilted as the only course now open is to wander through the ship hoping to stumble first on the maps, then on the gold, before your supplies run out. There are none of the challenges or need for lateral thinking as in more orthodox adventures, with the monotony only broken by rare high-resolution pics of crabs and sharks which are beaten off with no effort on your part.

An interesting idea, but this game is less seaworthy than the Titanic itself. By the way, the B-side of the tape offers music by Rare Breed, which is actually worse than the game! **GW**

Cursed castle

Adventure *Sadim Castle* **Micro** *BBC B and Electron* **Price** *£7.50* **Format** *Cassette* **Supplier** *MP Software Ltd, 165 Spital Road, Bromborough, Merseyside.*

HAVING BEEN sealed in her room to die, the Lady Leonora cursed her husband and all who set foot in Sadim castle. Your task is to locate Leonora's remains in the now deserted castle, give her a decent funeral and let the spirits rest in peace.

This is a text game using a split screen to separate your commands and the game's response. It is written in Mode 6 to make it Electron and BBC compatible. The text is coloured, a feature which I dislike as I associated it with inferior games in which each word is written in flashing rainbow ink to disguise how boring it really is. However I must confess I'm beginning to like it. One mild criticism is that different colours are used to indicate which part of a room's description is liable to change according to your actions. This is a 'nudge-nudge' some players don't like.

The game is written in machine code which accounts for the vast amount of text it appears to contain and it uses it to good effect. The element of real time is used so that while you sit scratching your head the screen tends to give 'Time Passes' messages which gives you the nasty feeling that the situation is not changing for the better!

The initial stages of the game consist of getting into the castle, which is all pretty murderous. A nice touch is the way you are encouraged to do certain actions which, if repeated at later stages, promptly kill you. Empty rooms once visited suddenly become populated by nasty characters to dissuade you from returning and there is a constant howling in the distance which seems to be getting closer by the minute. The game has a professional feel and the well written descriptions give a nice atmosphere.

Now the bad news. To compound the problems of what to carry there is one object which you must have or a nasty character tends to slit your throat. This is fair and it's also right that you should know how to use this object to protect yourself. However the monster appears every few moves and you must constantly repeat the same action until it becomes a royal pain in the posterior!

The game also follows the current vogue for strolling characters who can assist you if you first help them. That being the case I'm not at all sure how I'm supposed to help the 'Sobbing drunk', as having spent an unsuccessful hour trying to push a wheel-barrow through a bramble-chocked path I feel like crying myself. **AM**

Eternity

Adventure *Quest for Eternity* **Micro** *Spectrum 48K* **Price** *£7.99* **Format** *Cassette* **Supplier** *Argus Press Software Group, 1 Golden Square, London W1A 3AB*

QUEST FOR ETERNITY comes in a video style case with guidance and a resumé of the scenario on the cover.



The blurb boasts over 70 locations, with 99 verbs and 162 nouns being recognised by the program. Your objective is to become a Master of Eternity and to do so you must pass a series of challenging tasks. To begin with, you have to reactivate a disused spaceship. Once you've got this going, you must visit a number of planets to pick up objects that will be needed later. Then it's off to the teleportation booth which, if you succeed in operating it, will transport you to the Chamber of Creation so you can receive your just reward.▶

◀ According to the blurb the adventure is a "mind-twister". Well, it certainly twisted my mind. After several hours staring at the TV screen, I was seized by an attack of migraine and forced to temporarily abandon my quest. Even so, I was still stranded on the spaceship with a collection of gadgets which, so I was informed, couldn't be used yet. Eventually I located the systems manual and a memory cartridge. On examining the manual I was told there was something missing. Ah, I thought, you obviously have to insert the cartridge. This action did produce an "OK" message, but even so I couldn't switch it on.

Occasionally, a wrong instruction resulted in an error message, while the computer sometimes couldn't distinguish between words with similar spellings. Also, whichever location I happened to be in, typing "press switch" gave "something happened" even when there was no switch in sight.

There is no help or score facility. The former instruction simply urges you to persevere and reminds you that it's more fun trying to solve the game yourself. Enter score and you get "Liverpool 5 Man United 0", which isn't of very much use.

The screen presentation is fine, although whenever you pick up another object the computer wastes time showing your inventory without being asked. More annoying is the fact that you can't return to the description of your current location if it scrolls off the screen, unless you go elsewhere and come back later.

While there is a save facility, I found that the only way I could just quit and start again without having to reload, was (believe it or not) to misspell inventory.

As far as I know, there's only one way off this spaceship and that's through the airlock. Since you don't have any air supply with your spacesuit, you can always commit suicide rather than be stranded on an interstellar *Marie Celeste* with no prospect of rescue. Unless, of course, you manage to get the spaceship working, in which case you've still got another 60 or so locations to go in this genuinely mind-twisting text adventure. **JF**

Hampstead

Adventure *Hampstead* **Micro** *Spectrum 48K* **Price** *£9.95* **Format** *Cassette* **Supplier** *Melbourne House.*

IF YOU'VE ever had cause to wonder why the dustbins of Hampstead have no lids, you're sure to get immense pleasure from playing *Hampstead*. Described by Melbourne House as "a new type of adventure game", it certainly is different. The authors, Trevor Lever and Peter Jones, seem to take a perverse delight in running down social climbers, which is exactly what you will become if you play the game!

The purpose of the game is to attain 'Hampstead', which basically means living in the 'right' house, with the 'right' partner (BOO here to Melbourne House for insisting that I, a female, search for a wife), wearing the 'right' clothes, using the 'right' mode of transport, and being seen in the 'right' places. You must also be prepared to teach your children Esperanto and nail snow-shoes to the walls of your loo (well, every little bit supposedly helps), and if your name is Dave or Tracey you may have to change it to Tarquin or Pippa if you wish to be accepted into the Hampstead elite.

The program was written with the *Quill,* which you either love or hate, and is text only. In my opinion, some of the locations and situations cry out for graphic interpretation — the loading page has an excellent one, depicting the same picture which appears on the box, and it is a little disappointing to be faced with the boring blue screen and red objects common to Quill-originated programmes once the game has loaded. For this reason, I think the game is perhaps a little over-priced, although the sense of humour (this really is a funny game) probably makes up for it.

Should you become irretrievably stuck, you can send for a hint-sheet. However, beware! In sending for this you forfeit for evermore your chance of earning the diploma in social climbing which your lounge wall wouldn't be complete without.

You begin the adventure in your dingy council flat in seedy N.W. London (careful, I lived there once!), apparently watching *3-2-1* on television. As the game commences on a Thursday, I don't quite see how this is possible, because *3-2-1* is only shown on Saturdays (OK, I admit it, I watch it, maybe that's why I haven't succeeded yet!). Anyway, you are told that this is a depressing, degrading position to be in, but when you try to TURN TV off, you can't! You aren't able to WATCH TV either, even though the verb is in the vocabulary list. This, incidentally, includes such words as ABSTAIN, KISS, MARRY, QUEUE and TRANSLATE, a pleasant change from the usual commands. You are also warned that certain words are not acceptable in Hampstead, but not what those words are. However, as this comes under the heading of Bad Language, I daresay you can guess.

Your first task is to find yourself a job, and to do this you can (surprise, surprise) visit the Job Centre, but don't expect any miracles there. A visit to the kitchen will provide nourishment to set you on your journey (it's worth buying the game to discover what this is).



When I first loaded my copy (on side one) it seemed to be full of bugs. My bedroom walls were painted *cickly* orange, and mushrooms sprouted *throegh* the floorboards, there was a *rusbin y key* in the kitchen and when, unable to escape from that room, on typing FIND DOOR I was told *verify ind it yourself!* The HELP routine elicited the reply that my intercom was warbling and Sir Lionel wanted to see me in his office (a likely story considering my lowly status). On re-loading on the other side, all these mysterious factors disappeared — my bedroom appeared normal, the key became a small rusty one, and I discovered that there is no HELP facility, apart from advice to phone the Samaritans, which becomes monotonous after a while, seeing as I don't seem to possess a telephone! Since then I haven't been able to load side one at all.

Anyway, once I did escape the filthy kitchen, I managed to get myself mugged almost immediately by a gang of marauding thugs after my giro-cheque, and on the next attempt I was terrorised by soccer hooligans armed with fire extinguishers. Luckily, by then I had already read the interesting article by Justin Perrier in *Arts & Antiques* magazine (no, it doesn't help, but I'm glad I read it before I kicked the bucket).

Eventually, I found my way to Oxford Street, via rail and bus (atmosphere is provided by having to wait for them to arrive, although they seem too regular to be convincing!). Once in the West End, I discovered the ways of acquiring at least two of the 'right' things, but not the means. So far I've acquired nothing that will get me into Hampstead, even though I have scored 43%.

Incidentally, did you know that 24% of Hampstead folk (Hampsteadonians?) die as a result of choking on muesli? To find out what a further 11% die of, you'll have to buy the game! **JL**

Runemagic!

Adventure *Runemagic Series* **Micro** *BBC B* **Price** *£6.95 each* **Format** *Cassette* **Supplier** *Triffid Software Research, Cullwood Lane, Ashley, New Milton, Hants.*

I HAVE often thought that many adventures would benefit from your being able to define your own character, as is done in D&D, rather than just having 'a player'. This would enable you to gain experience by completing adventures, allowing your character to go on to bigger and better things. (Such as harder adventures.) Finally, one exists. Triffid have produced the *Runemagic* adventures (two at the moment, more to come), based very loosely on the *Runequest* game.

The first package consists of a character generator and the first adventure, *The Secret River*. You roll up a suitable character using the generator. You then buy a weapon and learn some spells; finally you might even be able to afford some armour. When you are satisfied with your character, he/she is saved onto tape, ready to use in adventures. Your saved character can then be loaded into any *Runemagic* adventure, although a level one character would have little chance of completing any adventure other than number one.

The Secret River is deliberately a fairly simple introductory adventure. Even so, a couple of problems had me stumped for a while. Your aim (your character's aim?) is to locate and drink from the fabled secret green river, which will supposedly increase your strength. Needless to say, en route, the solutions to various problems must be found, before you can accomplish your quest. In addition to this, various fantasy monsters have to be defeated, ambushed or generally given a hard time.

The combat sequence is well done, but can become a little drawn-out. Your character attacks the monster, (I favour the heavy mace), the monster has a crack at your character, your character attacks...and so on, until one of the combatants expires, or you decide that discretion is the better part of valour, and valiantly leave — rapidly! Before a mêlée, however, you have the chance to cast any spells your character knows.

Triffid Software Research

BBC-B RUNEMAGIC SERIES ADVENTURE TWO THE WIZARD'S CITADEL

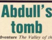
Upon completion of *The Secret River*, your now second-level character is saved onto tape, ready to be re-equipped (maybe) and to attempt the next adventure. The experience gained in the adventure improves your character's chances of defeating an opponent, as well as your chances of finding anything not on view.

The second adventure, supplied separately, is *The Wizard's Citadel*. Your task is simplicity itself; enter the Wizard Krell's citadel and relieve him of as much of his wealth as you can. Sounds easy enough, but things start to go awry pretty soon.

This adventure is slightly larger than the first, with around 100 locations to the 70 of the first. Not many compared to other adventures, but these two are mainly introductions. There are more puzzles in the citadel (or more precisely, below the citadel), and they have to be executed in a very strict order, otherwise you'll not progress very far! A couple of ingenious mazes are included; one of them is fairly easy, but the other, although very small, is rather tough.

However, I have a couple of minor gripes about these programs. Firstly; admittedly *The Secret River* is an introductory adventure, but while it should not take long to complete, you do need at least several goes at it. A load/save facility would have come in handy. Of the *Runemagic* series, *The Secret River* is the only one without this feature. Complaint two; as with most programs, those in the *Runemagic* series load in several parts. One part of each program is a graphic screen to display while the rest of the program loads. So far so good. *The Citadel* uses a simple Mode 7 screen, but the generator and *The Secret River* screens use Mode 2! The upshot of this is that it takes almost five minutes to load a display screen! Great idea, but stick to the Mode 7. Last complaint; my own favourite annoyance, spelling mistakes and punctuation errors. Only a few, but when there is one, is it a good one! (Also, crossbows do not shoot arrows...)

Triffid are now using a compression method that will allow future adventures to consist of up to 3000 different locations, as well as hi-res graphics, yes, that's right, 3000! Adventure Three should be out on the BBC shortly before Christmas. Electron versions ought to be out around the same time, and will follow the BBC format, namely, adventures One and Two text only, with Three onwards including graphics. **AT**



Abdull's tomb

Adventure *The Valley of the Kings* **Micro** *BBC B and Electron* **Price** *£7.50* **Format** *Cassette* **Supplier** *MP Software Ltd, 165 Spital Road, Bromborough, Merseyside*

IT'S MIDNIGHT, I'm in a dark tunnel beneath King Abdull's pyramid and before me is a pit of cobras. I'm wearing a Gold Helmet, a Gasmask and carrying a Brass pole. I'm literally dying of thirst and beginning to think that there must be an easier way of earning a living! Someone appears to have volunteered me to be the one to crawl around down here in tunnels full of corpses, pits of spikes and wicker baskets which appear to be full of moving laundry — that hisses!

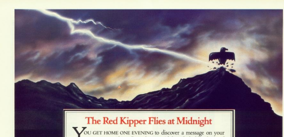
Yes here we are again in search of the Golden 'Wotsit' and old King Tut's curse seems to be as active as ever. To complete the scene, our old friend the torch which 'flickers and dies' just when we need it, has returned to help us!

The game is coloured text with the split screen format to separate commands and reponse. The theme is familiar, but has some nice touches. The element of time has been coupled to your torch and insatiable thirst, neither of which seem to last longer than the flick of a camel's tail.

MP SOFTWARE THE VALLEY OF THE KINGS ADVENTURE BBC/B

Progress through the game is pretty much controlled and there is little freedom to wander away as most routes only unblock after the successful completion of the current one. As you move, doors tend to slam behind you, leaving you to face the next hazard with no escape route. This style tends to prevent you having a quick look round before deciding which nasty to tackle first. One confusing aspect is that the game gives "You can't do that" messages when it really means "I don't know what you mean". This can lead you to believe that you are on the wrong track when in fact you are just using the wrong words.

If this game had appeared a year earlier it would have been considered pretty good. The latest games appear to have moved away from such standard plots as this, and usually contain a twist or novelty which is lacking here. The result is a workmanlike program which is perfectly adequate, but fails to capture the imagination as you feel you've seen it all before. **AM**



The Red Kipper Flies at Midnight

YOU GET HOME ONE EVENING to discover a message on your answering machine. Something you'd thought hidden for good has reared its ugly head once again. Valkyrie 17 is active.

Over the next five nights a series of frantic phone calls convince you that the matter deserves further investigation. You receive a dossier on the activities of Valkyrie 17. Pieced together from fragmentary reports culled from the last forty years you slowly begin to put the whole thing together. Drakenfeur, Heinrich and Reichsmuller. The badge pressed into your hand on the station at________________. And that last desperate call for help from the Glitz Hotel overlooking Lake Bruntz.

Your cover is good. Very good in fact. You spend a few days sniffing around and then head up towards Lake Bruntz. You check in to the Glitz Hotel. It's the last lead you have. You seem to be getting nowhere.

Then on your way to the bar you sense a movement in the shadows. You feel a blow on your temple. And everything goes black...

Valkyrie 17 is an Adventure featuring both graphic and text locations. You will meet several different characters some of whom may help you while others see your demise as their sole purpose in life.

Included in the pack is a comprehensive dossier on Valkyrie 17. On the reverse of the cassette tape are the answerphone messages. And then of course there's the game itself.

LOADING TIME	**5½ minutes.**	**MICRODRIVE**	**X/FER FUNCTION**
LOCATIONS	**100+**	**FUN FACTOR 8**	
LEVEL	**?**		
SOUND	**Beep Beep**		

HINTS

Watch your back, try not to get killed and mind your language.

The RamJam Corporation cannot accept responsibility for injury either mental or physical caused during the playing of Valkyrie 17. Furthermore the existence of these words affects your statutory rights.



Valkyrie 17 is distributed by Palace Virgin Gold, 69 Flempton Road, London E10 7NL. Telephone: 01-539 5566. Available from all leading wholesalers.

Squash!

Text Compressor *Squash* **Micro** *BBC B* **Format/Price** *Cassette £9.75, Disc £11.95* **Supplier** *Pro-Supply Ltd., 4 Beech Court, Pocklington, York.*

THE MAIN BUGBEAR to the amateur adventure writer is how to fit a quart of text into a pint of memory. A quick glance at any book on text compression techniques is enough to make the average writer 'THROW BOOK' and 'GO WEST QUICKLY!'. Well, *Squash* may be the answer to 'PRAY HARD'.

The short instruction sheet informs us that your text messages can be compressed up to 42% of original size. This is achieved by a combination of a dictionary of repeated words and the use of the radix method of combining three characters into two. With this program you too may be able to compete with the likes of Level 9 software and scatter text round your program like a drunken sailor with his pay. With the commercial world in mind it should be noted that Pro-Supply do not attempt to retain any rights over the software produced with the help of *Squash*. There are some companies who insist on at least being mentioned in the 'credits' and others who go so far as to insist in a share of the profits!

The use of the program is very simple as it incorporates a line editor which is used in the initial creation of the text. Other uses such as Saving, Printing, Squashing etc are called up through the use of function keys. The final database created may be loaded anywhere in memory and used from within your Basic or Assembler program. The database itself contains the code necessary to retrieve and display the message required by the program, and is simple to use. The code steals the user memory locations &70 to &7D for its use, otherwise it is self contained. To print a message you set locations &70 and &71 to the message number required by the following method:

```
?&70=MESSNO MOD 256
?&71=MESSNO DIV 256
```

Where MESSNO is the message number. A final CALL command to the start address of the database completes the action. If this sounds a little technical fear not, a step by step example is given which makes it quite simple. As the printing is carried out by a code routine the speed of execution is instantaneous.

The process can cope with upper and lower case characters but I found that my review version could not handle colour. Use of colour text is becoming the norm in commercial adventures as it brightens up the game and helps to highlight certain items. A quick phone call to Pro-Supply and they agreed to devise a solution. By the next day the company had returned with a method which not only incorporates a single colour selection but also the ability to have different colours anywhere within any line. This information will now be included in the user commands accompanying squash.

The company was helpful, sympathetic and eager to incorporate any good suggestions. The end result is an extremely useful, if not essential part of an adventure writers toolkit. I certainly will be using it. **AM**

Beam me up again

Game *Star Force Seven* **Micro** *BBC B* **Price** *£7.95* **Format** *Cassette* **Supplier** *Argus Press Software Group, 1 Golden Square, London, W1A 3AB*

THE *STAR TREK* program, originally run on a large corporate mainframe computer after working hours, has come a long way in the last few years thanks to the recent proliferation of home micros. Every micro has its variants of this classic and whilst most attempts are based strictly on the original Enterprise-Klingon warfare, in quite simple terms, several of the more adventurous efforts have added and expanded the original concept. Graphics are now easily available and with large amounts of memory, many more options can be given to the player. Such is the latest game from Argus Press — a 'Beam me up Scotty' with knobs on, and one of a series of adventure and strategy games under the generic title *Mind Games*.

The object of the game is to destroy the alien Zurgs, to prevent their invasion of Earth. Victory is achieved by the simple (!) expedients of capturing twenty five planets or by destroying the very well protected Zurg home planet.

Strategies in the game are pleasingly involved, unlike a great many *Startrek* games, and quite subtle; it is futile to try and engage the Zurg fleet early on, as I found to my cost, unless you have captured a few planets on which to establish an industrial base to build your fighters. Again, of vital importance to your mission is the gathering of intelligence about the enemy. With this in mind it is essential to maintain a fleet of scout ships.

Once an enemy fleet is engaged, there are several options covering the type of strike required, whether dispersed or concentrated. As a last resort, you can break-off to a randomly selected planet, if the going gets too tough.

Really, author Ian Soutar has encapsulated all of the classic features of a game of this type in one package, and is to be commended, although it must be said that for a machine as good as the BBC, the graphics could be better — but that detracts little from the overall game. **GW**

Doom!

Adventure *Countown to Doom* **Micro** *BBC B* **Format/Price** *Cassette £9.95, Disc £11.50* **Supplier** *Acornsoft Ltd., Betjeman House, 104 Hills Road, Cambridge, CB2 1LQ.*

HANDS UP all of you with experience of repairing spaceships on a planet with a corrosive atmosphere. What, none of you? Nobody? Ah, well then, let me tell you about Acornsoft's program that lets you do just that...*Countdown to Doom*.

Your spaceship was seriously damaged in a battle (so much for your piloting skill) causing it to crash onto the plant Doom. An unsavoury aspect of Doom is that it has a highly corrosive atmosphere (as mentioned above) which is playing havoc with what is left of your ship. Consequently, in 220 moves, the ship will be reduced to a large pile of scrap. (Got the significance of the title now?) Fortunately, Doom is littered with spaceship spares (six, to be precise) although why the atmosphere has not affected these is beyond me. To make your stay on Doom more profitable, there are also six treasures scattered across the planet.

Doom itself is a strange planet. In addition to its terminal case of acid rain, within a few minutes walk of each other you have jungle, desert, swampland, a glacier, a volcano and a ruined city. This, I am afraid, stretches the imagination just a bit too far. Yes, it is a fantasy game, but surely that's a little much.

This picturesque holiday world has much to offer in the way of native wildlife; irritable sandworms, unfit rats, and suicidal blobs of jelly, not to mention the incredible shrinking hydra. it would be more than useful to earn the gratitude of one of these creatures. (If you've played *Hamil*, you'll know what I mean.)

If you are a fan of mazes then there are a couple here that should give you no problems at all. As for decoding, the code you will find can be solved in nothing flat.

This program uses the standard Acornsoft approach of describing each location fully once, and on each subsequent visit, a highly abbreviated description is given. I am still not convinced that this is a good idea. I'd rather the extra memory was used for extra locations, instead of another set of descriptions. *Doom* has, give or take a few, 60 locations. I know that there are a few locations I have yet to find, as these are mentioned in the help leaflet. It doesn't help me find them though.

Acornsoft adventures, unlike many others, seem to be very thoroughly checked for spelling errors, and *Doom* is no exception. However, the option to quit the game should be questioned, as everyone makes the occasional mistake. **AT**

First adventure

Adventure *My First Adventure* **Micro** *Commodore 64* **Price** *£5.95* **Format** *Cassette* **Supplier** *Jolly Rogers Software, 19 Castleton Avenue, Barnehurst, Bexleykeath, Kent DA7 6QT*

MY FIRST ADVENTURE is also the first adventure I've seen where typing in a command such as DROP WHEELBARROW produces the appropriate sound effect, and the mind boggles at the thought of where this trend might lead to: REMOVE TROLL'S HEAD WITH SWORD, for instance? Not that such a gruesome instruction is likely to be needed here in one of the increasing number of adventures aimed at younger children. The cassette cover doesn't state the age-range aimed at, which is bad, but it should appeal to roughly the upper infants/lower junior children, who would be old enough to cope with the idea of playing an adventure game, and with the spellings, as well as being familiar with the nursery rhymes on which it is based. The authors do, however, guarantee the spellings — it says something for the general standard of adventure-writing that this has to be mentioned as a bonus!

Rather than give children some awesome task like killing a dragon, they're expected to solve ten small problems revolving around various nursery rhyme characters. Early on in the game, for example, you find a horn if you LOOK in the right place, then later you encounter a boy asleep in a haystack. Closer examination reveals that he is wearing blue, so if you WAKE BOY then GIVE HORN you might expect to get some response. You could also BLOW HORN yourself for another of the program's sound effects.

Each problem solved earns points and most also provide a reward which will enable you to move on and solve another problem. The story starts with you outside your house, and you then set off to explore country paths, farmyards, fields, woods, streams and other pleasant places in your search for people to help and objects to help them with. Though mostly a text-adventure, many of the locations do also have an introductory illustration which stays on the screen till you press a key.

The problems do seem to be about the right level of difficulty for children of that age range, some of them being slightly simpler to give encouragement, others requiring a little more thought, yet nothing of the "How do I get out of the Goblins' Dungeon?" complexity.

As well as teaching vocabulary and spelling, and encouraging logical thought processes, the authors say that they hope the adventure will introduce young players to that kind of game. Three cheers for that intention — grab 'em while they're young, we say.

Even our trusty old torch makes an appearance, so it has to be the right kind of introduction, and all in all this is a good piece of software for parents with young children to consider buying. I hope *My First Adventure* isn't the last from Jolly Roger. **MG**



LINEFEED

Computer books, game books, science fiction and fantasy books reviewed.

Stocking filler

Book *New Adventure Systems for the Spectrum* **Author** *S. Robert Speel* **Publisher** *Fontana* **Price** *£3.95*

THE IDEA behind this book may turn out to be more interesting than the book itself. It gives you six 'adventure systems', each of which consists of a core program of some kind plus a series of enhancements. In some cases the enhancements seem to be genuine variants of the basic system, ie different scenarios are provided so the core program runs a different game. But in other cases an uncharitable critic (who me?) would say that the game is not a 'system' at all, just a boring program which only becomes interesting when all its other features are added. This is like saying that the main supervising loop of a structured program is a 'core program' and all the procedures or subroutines it can call are enhancements of the system!

Almost all the book consists of the listings and commentary on them, mainly in the form of explanations of how to play the games. The author does not intend to teach you how to write adventures, or even how some of the bits of his program work. However this is a very cheap way to obtain six basic adventures with variants (if you count all the scenarios as separate adventures you have twelve adventures at 33 pence each). Providing you have a masochistic love of typing. And providing you regard these games as adventures.

At least one of the games in this book seems to stretch the definition somewhat. *Tribe* is really a *Kingdom* or management variant, about holding elections, planting grain, starving peasants and surviving for another year. It could be called a simulation, but only of a fictional world. The other games have elements of arcade combat games, graphic games, puzzle adventures and combat adventures in various mixtures. The games are perhaps a bit quirky, but that means they are a mixture of inventiveness and oddity. Exactly which is which will depend on your individual taste.

My personal preference would be for a book with fewer listings, more ideas and more help on how to write similar games yourself. On the other hand it would be hard to find better value for money on a penny-per-puzzle basis. If you are a parent looking for a stocking-filler to keep the kids occupied on Boxing Day, you could do much worse. If you are a programmer looking for exciting new ideas or techniques, you can certainly do better. If you are both parent and programmer — you won't find the time to do the typing! **NW**

Reams of Basic

Book *Graphic Adventures for the Spectrum 48K* **Author** *Richard Hurley* **Publisher** *Micropress* **Price** *£5.95*

ON THE face of it, seven Spectrum graphic adventures for under six pounds must be a bargain, even if you do have to do the work of entering all the listings yourself. Unfortunately, the games are mediocre.

If the book is lacking in quality of programming, it is certainly not deficient in quantity, since there are reams of basic listings, with all but thirty of nearly two hundred pages in total being devoted to listings. This would be impressive if the programs were good, but the standard is low, with most of the predominantly single-statement lines involving printing to the screen or setting up the many User Defined Graphics. In purely programming terms, the only interest in the seven games is the machine code routine given for the fast generation of a 3D line drawn maze.

The best thing about the book is in its formal structure, with each of the seven listings introducing a different technique of game programming — alternate character sets, to increase the number of UDG's, pseudo-arrays, machine-coding for the essential fast drawing required for the maze, and so on. It must be said, though, that most of the techniques highlighted in this way are familiar to all but the absolute novice in Basic. **JF**

Power plays

Book *Power Plays on the Commodore 64* **Author** *Humphrey Walwyn* **Publisher** *Century Communications* **Price** *£6.95*

NOT MANY publishers feel that there is a market for *1001 Blockbusting Games for your Sinnodore Electrum* any more, but most seem to like books of listings if they seem to have a theme. This way the reader thinks she or he is getting an insight into how to design a particular kind of game, but is really buying a compendium of listings with something in common. Providing you realise this, you will be quite pleased by *Power Plays*.

This is the follow up to a very similar book by Mr Walwyn on wargaming. It has exactly the same virtues and drawbacks so if you know the first book you need read no further. The books are both about 250 pages long. These pages are divided between six games. Of the total volume over two hundred pages are taken up with listings, variable lists or screen displays, and the remaining text is primarily descriptions of the games and how to play them, with some sample runs.

The games are an attractive selection of simulations, based on power struggles of different kinds, mainly political and business games. Their subjects are a guerilla takeover, building a railway, international diplomacy, newspaper management and the energy crisis. All of these appear to be well thought out games. They might not be as thorough or as accurate as proper educational simulation might demand, but nor are they arbitrary collections of random variables. The aim is mainly to give an interesting game, but also to provide a degree of insight into the reality.

But the game that seems most original to me, and probably worth the book on its own, is a multi-player election simulation. Each player takes the role of an animal vying for votes in farm, garden and household constituencies. It is really a board game (for which you must make your own board) involving square-hopping and exchanges of money in the Monopoly tradition.

At the price of one tape for six substantial programs you must be getting a bargain if only one game is worthwhile, and the wargames in Mr Walwyn's previous book were all competent pieces of work. I doubt if any of the games would find their ways into the best-selling charts (and if they could, we would not see them in books), and you will only learn about writing such games by doing your own analysis of the programs, but if you like to mix a little reality with your goblin-grinding you should find this £6.95 well spent. **NW**

Electron games

Book *Adventure Games for the Electron* **Author** *A. J. Bradbury* **Publisher** *Granada* **Price** *£6.95*

THIS BOOK is a re-write of Mr Bradbury's *Adventure Games for the Commodore 64*. It is common practice in the micro world to write 'the same book' for several different micros. In some cases the translation is done well, in others the conversions and influence of the original work are all too apparent. The fact that the Electron book is some 15 pages longer than its prototype shows that some extra work has been done to alter the original, but not very much. This extra is entirely taken up by a brief guide through some of the commands of BBC BASIC. If a reader knows his Electron, he will not need it. If he does not know it, there is not enough information here.

Much of the general text in both books is the same (except where the printers have added some improvisation of their own). The first chapters of both books, for example, are virtually identical apart from the opening 'grab the browser' paragraph. This is okay because you will find much the same thing in any adventure book you buy — a brief introduction to adventures, chapters on characters, map-making and array handling, a sample adventure, some speculation about the future, and one or two useful routines. The main section you might want to buy the book for is its text coding routine, but you might feel it is rather expensive just for this.

What is less attractive is the impression that the book is really about how to write CBM64 adventures on an Electron. True, there are pages on Electron graphics (eight) and sound (six) but very elementary stuff. Otherwise most of the programming is identical to that used for the Commodore — lots of GOTOs and GOSUBs, no long variable names or use of lower case, virtually no procedures in the book (so very little use of local variables or parameter passing), only one use of INSTR (though FOR . . . NEXT loops are used several times to find spaces or substrings) and some code that is very wasteful (in one case four lines where BBC BASIC could do the same job in one). If you are a real novice at adventures and you are not bothered about using the best features of BBC BASIC you will find this book quite helpful. If you are looking for an in-depth account of adventures or a book specific to the Electron, you might as well buy the Commodore version. **NW**

Fire*Wolf

Books *Fire*Wolf, The Crypts of Terror* **Author** *J H Brennan* **Publisher** *Fontana* **Price** £1.50

J H BRENNAN's second sortie into the realm of adventure game books in less than six months has yielded some of the most enjoyable books in the genre. The irony is that Brennan seems to work much less hard than any of his competitors.

The basic scenario of the books will be extremely familiar to even the most casual reader of fantasy. The Demonspawn are about to escape again from their hellish caverns underground and will come pouring over the mountains to destroy the helpless kingdom of Harn. It is of course the old *Lord of the Rings* formula recently rehashed for the *Lone Wolf* (note the similar name) series of gamebooks.

Brennan doesn't offer an original scenario, nor does he come up with any innovations in mechanics. Furthermore, the illustrations are few and far between but this only enhances the book-like feel of the *Sagas of Demonspawn*.

What Brennan does have going for him is a rather hackneyed literary ability. His writing skills may be limited when compared with most pure fantasy writers but he's streets ahead of the gamebook competition.

The bookish feel is increased by the length of the 'units'. Brennan goes to great descriptive lengths and some are several pages long. Furthermore, the game is divided into 'chapters' which makes it possible to put it down and pick it up later. Brennan is also quite fair, and certain types of behaviour will consistently yield the best results. He also likes to try and set the players problems.

All in all the book has the feel of a good dungeon adventure, largely because it is most like a good book. Those who want a lot of 'play' will be disappointed.

The book does utilise a quite complex combat system which further increased my doubts as to the desirability of combat in these solo adventures. Who wants to die and go back and start reading exactly the same text again and, equally important, who wants to read a book sat at a table so they can keep notes and roll dice, when they can curl up comfortably in an armchair and cheat.

The books' sole innovation is the introduction of sex. Brennan is not aiming them at children but, it seems, at the spotty adolescent youths who dominate the role playing game 'hobby'. A pity there is no warning to unsuspecting parents. **PGB**

Five go to Firetop Mountain

Books *The Haunted Railway Game/The Wreckers' Tower Game* **Publisher** *Hodder and Stoughton* **Price** *£3.95 each*

THE LATEST additions to the burgeoning ranks of adventure game books are adaptations, by an anonymous hand, of two of Enid Blyton's Famous Five adventures: Five go down to the sea *and* Five go off to camp. *They are the most attractively packaged and most expensive of the game books to date.*

The books come in durable plastic envelopes and contain maps, plastic rucksacks and lunch-boxes, equipment and meals to go inside them and a nice little dice with the silhouettes of the Five on five faces and 'mystery' on the sixth. The books themselves are well bound and printed on good paper, designed for repeated use.

The designer, having come up with several game book innovations, like a pair of binoculars with holes strategically placed to decipher coded messages, seems to have difficulty incorporating them into an interesting adventure book.

The characterisation, sparse and flat in the original, vanishes totally in these books. This is a serious problem because of the way the designer of the game has removed all decision making from the player. Where a choice is offered it is between the opinions of the four human members of the five and two 'blind' chances: Timmy and mystery. The player resolves the dilemma by rolling the dice (or cheating and always taking the mystery which is the best).

Since the characters have no character the choices seem largely random — no Julian always taking the lead here.

The choices still seem largely random even after they've been taken. The separate 'units' are written in such a way that it is often impossible to be sure that you've turned to the right one, even after checking back. In order to allow several different 'routes' through the story the designer has written most of the units so that, it seems, you can turn to them in any order.

The weakness of the plot is a fatal flaw in an adventure game which lives on the strength of its narrative drive. Not only did I finish neither book, but my curiosity was so little aroused that I didn't even try to find out what happened in the end by cheating. **PGB.**



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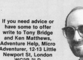
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ADVENTURE HELP



If you need advice or have some to offer write to Tony Bridge and Ken Matthews, Adventure Help, Micro Adventurer, 12-13 Little Newport St, London WC2R 3LD

WHO is this upstart Matthews? Where is trusty Tony? Before you all write in to cancel your subscriptions — I'm only here for a month while Tony finishes his new bestseller. Still, enough explanation, on with business.

First, from the other side of the world, Robert Hardie of Sydney, Australia, asks to be recommended a 'starting' adventure for his BBC and I'm happy to oblige. Try *Adventureland* and *Pirate Adventure* (as reviewed in this issue) to begin with before moving on to Peter Killworth's excellent games from Acornsoft themselves.

A plea from A.R. Stewart of 28 Stevenson Avenue, Glenrothes, Fife KY6 1EG who wishes players of *Ring of Darkness* to get in touch, "so a serious assault can be made on the game".

A final word on *The Hobbit*, perhaps, to an anonymous adventurer at 35 Pine Close, Brant Road, Lincoln, who cannot pass the "bulbous eyes". Try 2-13-29-4-19-7; 34-39-36; 2-13-29-4-19-7. This should do it! Nick Barham of Leeds reminds us that Thorin isn't much use after the infamous Goblin's Dungeon and begs a tip to light his way in *Snowball*. To get the battery pack, 32-24-38-16-26-21-16-8.

Scott Graham of Lochmaben, Dumfrieshire is stuck in the 'Hot Valley' of *Knight's Quest* and 5-35; 3-37 should see you through. To cross the lava in *Temple of Vran* 33-14-23-31-17-27-12.

Arctic's evergreen *Espionage Island* is recommended by lots of you for beginners but has provided a few snags for Richard Brooks. To move the rock 18-35-6-9; 18-35-6-25; 34-29-25; 30-28-10-15. In *Urban Upstart*, you will need 22-20 to get past the guard and 11-1 to enter the Town Hall.

Thanks to Johnathan of 2 Brookray Lane, Frodley, Nr. Lichfield, Staffs for some kind comments — I agree — more space for Tony Bridge! There are loads of tips we can't fit in because of space. Johnathan offers help on a list of adventures for the BBC, so drop him a line (including an SAE).

Another reader offering tips, this time for the Spectrum, is Paul Maxwell of 16 Foxwood Drive, Fairfield, Stockton-on-Tees.

Finally, two queries from my phone-in Adventureline; How do you get past the crocodiles in *Smugglers' Cove* and an appeal for any information on Bug-Byte's *The Castle*.

Thanks to all of you who've sent in tips and solutions to me that I've used in this column, particularly Hugh Walker, Karen Tyers and Dave Barker.

The adventures of the moment are *Sherlock* and *Hamstead* from Melbourne House, the final part of the Ket trilogy, *The Final Mission*, from Incentive Software and Level 9's sequel to *Snowball* — *Return to Eden*. Please let Tony and I know how you're doing — or not doing — as the case may be!

1 Tape; 2 Move; 3 Climb; 4 Direction; 5 Lower; 6 To; 7 Travel; 8 Screwdriver; 9 Handle; 10 Push; 11 Red; 12 Trampoline; 13 Once; 14 Block; 15 Pedal; 16 The; 17 Stepladder; 18 Tie; 19 Of; 20 Papers; 21 With; 22 Official; 23 Jump; 24 It; 25 Truck; 26 Viewer; 27 Onto; 28 Starter; 29 In; 30 Pull; 31 Off; 32 Lever; 33 Carry; 34 Then; 35 Rope; 36 Twice; 37 Down; 38 From; 39 Wait.

ADVENTURE CONTACT

MICRO Spectrum 48K **Adventure** Colditz **Problem** I am on the window ledge and have 30 foot of rope. How do I get down? **Name** Ian Walker **Address** 1 Kinnair Close, Soothill, Batley, W Yorks WF17 6HL.

MICRO CBM 64 **Adventure** Token of Ghall **Problem** How to get out of room in castle — seems impossible to open door **Name** Bob Hewitt **Address** 36 Vernon Avenue, Raynes Park, London SW20 8BW.

MICRO Spectrum 48K **Adventure** The Golden Apple **Problem** How do I get past the mean crocodile, how do I use the matches? **Name** Craig Gregory **Address** 210 Wordsworth Crescent, Blacon, Chester CH1 5UH.

MICRO Spectrum 48K **Adventure** The Woods of Winter **Problem** What do I do with the well and the frozen knight? **Name** Paul Brunyee **Address** 35 Loxley Road, Glenfiled, Leicester LE3 8PG.

MICRO Spectrum 48K **Adventure** Velnor's Lair **Problem** How can I get past the waterfall, and how do I use the statue of the dragon? **Name** Stuart Pearson **Address** 9 Cheltenham Close, Bottesford, Scunthorpe, S Humberside DN16 3SJ.

MICRO Olivetti M24 **Adventure** Enchanter **Problem** Cannot open chest in closet, nor enter guarded tower **Name** J D Richardson **Address** 17 Rodney Street, St Budeaux, Plymouth PL5 1BD.

MICRO BBC B **Adventure** Philosopher's Quest **Problem** Where is the old woman's dog, how do I get the cheese without the smell killing me? **Name** Ceri Evans **Address** Anlyn, Maengroes, Newquay, Dyfed.

MICRO Spectrum 48K **Adventure** Planet of Death **Problem** How do I wake the green man, and get the mirror? **Name** Gill Cooper **Address** 1 Knivet Close, Rayleigh, Essex.

MICRO Spectrum 48K **Adventure** The Wizard Akyrz **Problem** I'm stuck after only seven locations — please help! **Name** M Richards **Address** 7 Ellsmore Close, Romford, Essex RM3 7DA.

MICRO Spectrum 48K **Adventure** Temple of Vran **Problem** How do I swing over the quicksand, or reach the small hole high up in the wall? **Name** Mrs G Officer **Address** 1 Gleneagles Road, Hartlepool, Cleveland.

MICRO Dragon 32 **Adventure** El Diablero **Problem** How to get up the shaft at the sacred well, how to follow the footsteps. **Name** K N Wheeler **Address** 2 Burford Close, Southdown, Bath.

MICRO Spectrum 48K **Adventure** Lords of Midnight **Problem** Where are Fawkrin the Skulkrin, Lake Mirrow, and the village of Kor? **Name** Mark James **Address** 24 Bridge Street, Chatteris, Cambs.

HAVE YOU BEEN staring at the screen for days, or given up in disgust, stuck in an adventure whose problems seem insurmountable? Adventure Contact may be the answer. This column is designed to put adventurers in touch with one another. When you're stumped a fellow adventurer may be able to help — and you may be able to solve other people's problems. If you are having difficulties with an adventure, fill in this coupon and send it to Adventure Contact, Micro Adventurer, 12/13 Little Newport St, London WC2R 3LD. We will publish Adventure Contact entries each month in this special column.

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COMPETITION CORNER

Tony Roberts tests your skill — send your answers to Competition Corner, Micro Adventurer, 12-13 Little Newport St, London WC2R 3LD

No more heroes?

TISCH the black dragon has been acquiring additional powers with each passing month as you retrieve each successive Runic Ring from its defended hiding place.

This month it's the 'J' Ring, which is concealed in this maze, protected by all sorts of fiendish dark-loving creatures. Since Tisch learned the secrets of last month's ring she has been able to create light simply by the power of her mind, however, so she has filled the maze with light, sending its occupants scuttling into whatever dark corners they can find, while you've rushed in, determined to get to the ring before anything unpleasant happens.

But Tisch's strength is failing her, and the light flickers, dims...and you have just found yourself plunged into pitch darkness.

Worse, this is the last thing you saw...something you'd rather not meet is lurching round a far corner into the passage before you! The ring will give you protection, if you can get to it in time...can you work out the directions that will get you there by the shortest possible route?

This month's competition prize is rather special — 30 copies of the great new album from the Stranglers, *Aural Sculpture,* which features a specially written adventure game as well.

The music is on one side of the cassette, and the game, *Aural Quest*, is on the other. It is based on the album's theme, and involves the player in a journey round the world in search for all the pieces of the ear.

As a tie breaker, complete the following in 12 words or less: I want to own a copy of Aural Quest because...

All entries must be received by the last working day in November. Don't forget your name and address! Winners will be announced in the January issue.

September's competition, for which the prize was Adventure International's *The Hulk*, attracted our largest ever entry. You all seem to have enjoyed the challenge of making as many words as you possibly could out of Adventure.

The answer to the competition was 13, and the Chief Examiner was based on Scott Adams. The most words anyone managed to come up with was — wait for it now — 628!

And now to the winners; M A Griffiths of Poole, Koen Hartsuiker of Holland, Christopher Glover of Ponteland, D H Roberts of Hoarwithy, Alistair Hobbs of Basingstoke, M. Brett of Harbury, Ewan Watson of Balbeggie, Gregory Parker of Harpenden, Kevin Smith of Aberdeen, Martin Norton of Streetly, Ron Greenwood of Bexley, J D Lewis of Fradley, Chris Greaves of Langton Green, W A Prinn of Haverhill, P Johnson of Acklam, Adam Ruddle of Peterborough, P Gent of London, C J Harding of Beckenham, E H Furnival of Castleton (again!), Jerry Elsmore of Croydon, Lynda Craney of Shoeburyness, Ian Taylor of Denton Burn, Sue Osborne of Romney Marsha, Steven Bufton of Harpenden, Paul Russell of Brighton, and finally Peter Millen of Greyabbey (for sheer unadulterated cheek).

The winners will be receiving their prizes in due course.

Good luck with the maze — if you need any help, just ask Rattus Norvegicus! □

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